

JINKS' INSIDE



HARRIET HOBSON



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J I N K S ' I N S I D E



Flower. Good & Fine

THERE WAS NOT SUCH ANOTHER CHRISTMAS BREAKFAST

JINKS' INSIDE

BY
HARRIET MALONE HOBSON



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TO
THE MEMORY OF
MARTHA CHAPPELLE MALONE HOBSON
MY TEACHER, MY COUNSELOR, MY GOOD-COMRADE,
MY FRIEND, MY GUIDE, MY IDEAL,
MY MOTHER

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“I had rather be an amanuensis of the Infinite God, as it is my privilege literally to be, than a slave to the formulated rules of any rhetorician, or to the opinions of any critic. Oh, the people, the people over and over! Let me give something to them that will lighten the every-day struggles of our common life; something that will add a little sweetness here, a little hope there; something that will make more thoughtful, kind, and gentle this thoughtless, animal-natured man; something that will awaken into activity the dormant powers of this timid, shrinking little woman,—powers that when awakened will be irresistible in their influence and that will surprise even herself. Let me give something that will lead each one to the knowledge of the divinity of every human soul; something that will lead each one to the conscious realization of *his own divinity*, with all its attendant riches, and glories, and powers—let me succeed in doing this, and I can then well afford to be careless as to whether the critics praise or whether they blame. If it is blame, then under these circumstances it is as the crackling of a few dead sticks on the ground below compared to the matchless music that the soft spring gale is breathing through the great pine forest.”

RALPH WALDO TRINE.

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CHAPTER ONE

Jinks turned the corner that led from Paradise Alley into the street on a run, his hands thrust deep within his ragged pockets, the tattered cap he wore perched so far back on his red head it seemed to be sitting on space, for visible anchorage it had none. His mouth was wide open, and his voice, high and sweet, sent a ringing, "Who-o-o, Who-o-e-e!" echoing down the quiet street.

Just at that moment from the opposite direction came the Dog, fleeing as fast as three, fright-driven feet could bring him,—his pink tongue hanging out, the little heart of him almost bursting the silky brown sides, so wildly was it pounding from terror and fatigue. Around the corner he whirled, landing right in the midst of the astonished boy. Straight between Jinks' feet he ran,—a panting, brown streak. Right into the

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snow went the glowing red head, the brown dog serving as an animated cushion to break the fall. The tattered cap skipped nimbly from its precarious perch, and after several giddy gyrations settled down cosily in a drift near a lamp post.

The sudden encounter knocked all the breath out of both boy and dog. It also knocked something new and strange into the boy. As he sat up on the pavement spitting the soft snow out of his mouth, and wiping it off his face with his sleeve, Jinks felt a faint stir under the front of his ragged jacket,—a queer, warm stir it was, that made him suddenly acutely conscious of a newly sprouted liking for dogs,—silky brown dogs especially.

For a second the boy sat motionless in the snow, staring with lively curiosity at the quivering, gasping little creature before him. "I say," he grinned at last, reaching out a dirty, red hand to pat the brown head. "Ain't you just the very bungedapest little cuss ever I did see!"

"I am that!" acquiesced the dog, his mournful whimper broken in the middle by a pitiful gasp for the breath so recently knocked out of him. Then feeling the sympathy that radiated in an in-

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visible halo from the brilliantly topped bundle of rags before him, he held up a silky paw that hung limp and nerveless, mutely suggesting that all of his afflictions had not yet received the special notice he felt was due them.

"Well, now, sonny, ain't they just most done for you! Oh, my!" Jinks cocked his glowing head on one side as he spoke, and looked critically at the dog. For a second the two stared at each other silently, both alike unmindful of the bitter cold. It was a long look that passed between the impudent blue eyes and the frightened brown ones,—a look in which the so-called dumb, and the supposedly articulate souls clasped hands, as it were, and searched deep. It touched many things beyond the mental grasp of either boy or dog,—sounded depths neither could measure, both of whom were actively conscious of only one big, vital fact,—the suddenly discovered tie of brotherhood.

"Betcher life, I *like* dogs!" Jinks spoke as explosively as though a fire cracker had been touched off somewhere in his interior. He sat up straight in the snow, an animation resulting from his new discovery sending a delightful thrill

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of warmth coursing all through his half-frozen little anatomy.

"Betcher life I like — *some* boys!" qualified the dog, smiling broadly. Jinks patted his brown head again, and thus encouraged he got up to move nearer this new-found friend, hesitated, and abruptly sat down again. He hung his head, casting a sheepish glance up at Jinks, then turned his eyes rearward with an apologetic whimper. He was evidently too much of a gentleman to call attention to the embarrassing predicament in which he found himself. His silence was eloquent, however, though he only sat still in the snow and stared hard at his tail.

"Gee!" sniggered Jinks, his blue eyes twinkling as his glance followed the dog's. Then as thorough understanding came to him, his smiles vanished as suddenly as though attached to a string and hauled inside. "Ain't that the bum thing!" he snorted, leaping to his feet as indignation began to bubble and sizzle inside him. "To be running a three-legged dog, *with* a tin can tied to his tail! Oh, my!"

Not wishing to make his companion feel any more uncomfortable than he evidently already was,

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the boy bent down and began to untie the string with red, numb fingers. The dog looked on a moment, deep interest in his eyes, then his pink tongue licked the hands that were trying to free him in token of his approval and appreciation, and also as evidence of his readiness to assist, had his will only been backed by the ability. As Jinks worked at the tight knot, the wind shrieked along the icy street, cutting like a whip-lash. Boy and dog both shivered when the blast struck them,—but with a difference. Jinks was used to being cold, and now he merely shrank up into smaller compass within his rags, his lips grew a little bluer, his teeth chattered a little faster,—but he said nothing. The dog was not accustomed to hardships, his soft, well-groomed coat silently proclaimed that fact, and as the wind pierced through his silky brown covering to the tender body inside, he whimpered and whined the vigorous protest that the boy unconsciously felt, though he had never, as yet, given it verbal utterance.

“They are right after you, son! I hear ’em a coming.” Jinks raised his head alertly as he spoke, and stood listening, one hand on the dog, the other grasping the rusty tin can.

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From around the next corner there sounded a shrill yell.

"That's John Preston. I'd know his voice anywhere!" The boy's brow darkened. Grasping the dog in one arm he sprang into the gutter, his slim figure erect, his freckled face hard and defiant, while out of his blue eyes died the light that had proclaimed his kinship to all living creatures. They had in an instant lost their youth, and had become the old, wise eyes that for ten years had looked out upon street life in all the heart-wrenching, soul-stultifying forms it daily assumed in Paradise Alley.

The created creature had disappeared in the twinkling of an eye. Where it had stood was an impish little Ishmael that cold and starvation combined were rapidly moulding into the caricature of a man.

"Hi, there, you Jinks! Give me my dog!" A group of well-dressed boys dashed around the corner, and brought up before the ragged child standing at bay in the gutter.

Jinks grinned impudently at the tall, handsome chap who had spoken. "He ain't your dog!" he cried, giving his glowing head a jaunty tilt, and

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clasping the trembling brown bundle he held in his left arm close to the breast of his ragged jacket. "He ain't — *he ain't — he ain't!* You *know* he ain't!" he chanted derisively.

"I'll soon show you whose dog he is if you don't pass him over!" John Preston stooped as he spoke, and began to scoop up snow with both hands in a suggestive fashion. Three of the boys with him at once assumed the same frog-like positions, and also began to gather snow. The fourth, a meager, pale little chap with pop-eyed spectacles, stepped behind the backs of the others, and by a series of truly astonishing facial twists, telegraphed to Jinks that he could impart something of vast importance had he the chance.

"What you running him on three legs for, with a tin can tied to his tail, if he's your dog?" demanded Jinks. As he spoke he landed a ball of snow with careful precision, exactly on John Preston's left ear.

A roar of rage followed this opening of hostilities, and a rain of balls, squeezed round and pressed hard by vigorous fists, were hurled in a blinding torrent full at the ragged figure in the gutter. It soon began to go hard with the small

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champion, for though he fought gamely, with a jaunty defiance that was conducive to ultimate victory, he had but one free hand, the other being fully occupied with preventing his squirming charge from spilling bodily to the ground. Defeat loomed large before Jinks' mental eyes, and with a terrible sinking in the center of his empty little middle, he realized that defeat for him meant capture and possibly death for the soft, brown ball palpitating under his left arm. A queer, sick pang went through him. For the first time in his life Jinks suffered vicariously.

"Gee!" he muttered confidentially to the back of the dog's neck as he bent to grasp a handful of snow. "We got to have some help or it'll pretty soon be up with you, son!" With a jaunty tilt of his chin he stood upright, and sent the newly made ball flying straight at the top of John Preston's head. As it struck, powdering the tall boy's dark hair thick with hoary white, Jinks stuck two fingers between his lips and whistled shrilly. Three times he sent the clear notes ringing out on the cold air in such quick succession that the other boys recognized them as a signal, and hooted derisively.

So promptly did the answer come to the whis-

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tled help-call, that the little figure whirling around the corner out of Paradise Alley, its tattered skirts flapping about long, coltish legs, might literally have sprung out of the ground.

"It's them up-town chaps, Sis!" Jinks piped, as a big ball of snow, propelled by Jimmy Wray's arm, sent him reeling against the fence.

With one of the quick, impatient gestures characteristic of her, Sis tossed aside a mass of dark hair from a pair of big gray eyes, as bright and untamed as those of a young hawk. "What they done?" she demanded, leaping into the gutter beside Jinks with the agility of a petticoated spider, and pushing up her sleeves as she spoke.

"It's — a — dog! A — three-legged — one, and a — tin — can tied — to his tail!" The brief words of explanation were propelled out of Jinks in a series of popgun-like explosions, the cause being the rapidity with which he was alternately dodging balls, and bending to grasp the white means of retaliation. "Give 'em ginger, Sis!"

"Sure! Three legs,—*and* a tin can!" Sis spoke briefly, her big eyes flashing from the trembling dog in Jinks' arms to the crowd of well-dressed boys confronting her. Then she nodded

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her thorough mental grasp of the situation in its entirety, and in another second was scooping up snow with both brown hands in a scientific fashion evidently perfected by long practice.

The snow battle assumed another aspect with the advent of the small amazon from Paradise Alley upon the scene of action. In an incredibly short time Sis was the animated center from which poured a steady hail of balls as round and hard as rocks, and so well directed that very soon two small noses had added a touch of brilliant scarlet to the general whiteness of the landscape.

"You better give me my dog!" shouted John, the full force of his command being lost in a vain endeavor to swallow part of a snow ball Sis had landed full in his wide-open mouth.

"He ain't your dog, John Preston! You know he ain't!" Jinks shrilled back in reply.

"He ain't, Jinks, he ain't!" From behind Jimmy Wray there suddenly twittered the thin little voice of Billy King. Billy gave his inner quakings an outer prop by clasping his tan-gloved fingers tight across his trigly overcoated solar-plexus. Thus braced, his wobbly legs brought him out into the middle of the street. "I tell you he ain't, he

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ain't!" he piped like a tightly wound up phonograph. "He ain't nobody's dog but just his own self's. We found him sitting on a corner catching a flea!"

"Take that, you little sneak!" As he passed on a run, John Preston thrust forth a stoutly shod foot and, tripping Billy, sent him sprawling on his back in the snow. The little chap lay where he fell, paddling aimlessly with his arms and kicking feebly with his legs as might an overturned kitten.

"O-h-h-h, my! But ain't you the sneak yourself! Kicking a little chap that ain't growed him any spunk-uper to fight with yet!" Jinks gave a wild-cat yell, and tossed the dog he held to Sis. She caught the burden deftly, as though expecting it, and tucking it under her arm without any comment, went on with her ball-making and ball-throwing.

"I made your old nose all blodgy once before for doing dirt to Billy King. I'll fix it again!" Like a two-legged whirlwind Jinks leaped on John Preston, butting, kicking, clawing and punching all at once. The older boy writhed to and fro in a vain endeavor to break loose from the small fury that had attacked him. Trying to dislodge

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Jinks, though, was very much like shaking off a sheet of fly paper, whose adhesive qualities he seemed to possess. At each shake that John gave, Jinks not only attached himself the tighter where he was, but managed to stick in an entirely new place.

"You just take that! And next time you want to fight pitch into somebody besides a three-legged dog and a boy too staggy in his legs to stand up!" Jinks panted. At the same moment his brown fist landed a vicious blow on the end of the aspiring knob that ornamented the center of John's face. A howl of anguish followed, and ejecting a gusty breath, indicative of soul-satisfaction, Jinks turned his victim loose, grasped the dog again, and rejoined Sis in the gutter.

Billy King sat up in the snow, all his recent courage escaping through the pores of his ænemic skin. "He ain't!" he whimpered to himself, as the battle swept farther down the street, leaving him alone. Blinking something out of his eyes, he struggled to his feet and, crossing weakly to the fence, leaned there, watching the other boys longingly through his pop-eyed glasses.

For two years Billy had adored Jinks at a dis-

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tance with all the fervor of his timid heart, longing to claim the gutter boy for a friend as he had never before longed for anything in his sheltered, hot-house life. For to the only child of the banker Jinks possessed every desirable trait and accomplishment that could belong to a boy. His slim brown legs could run faster than any one's in the whole town; he could bound on and off, swiftly moving vehicles with the lightness of a bird in flight, and was quite as much at ease standing on his head as he was on his heels.

Besides these greatly-to-be-desired accomplishments, Jinks was friends with people and things whose mere acquaintance Billy King ached to possess. Jinks and the ashman were sworn pals; he marched through the streets beside every band that came to town, and pranced along close to the biggest elephant whenever there was a circus parade. Then Jinks' gay audacity was not even awed by the big policeman whose beat lay around the handsome square whereon Billy's home stood. He had seen Jinks actually scamper up behind the officer's broad, blue back one day and tweak the flowing tail of his august coat! The very thought of such courage made Billy grow weak in his neat

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little knees, though at the same time it sent a thrill of delight coursing through his body, that somehow was always cold and always tired.

In the queer, occult fashion whereby boys hold silent communication with each other, Jinks knew of Billy's adoration. In return he bestowed upon his small satellite a lordly patronage that the banker's son accepted humbly, his gratitude in nowise affected by the fact that his tow head did not touch even the lowest branch of his towering family tree, while Jinks did not possess a name at all, life having been thrust upon him without that badge of respectability. As yet, though, he had not felt the sinister lack, the mere act of living demanding all his time, as well as all the cunning that had been engrafted in his mind by the working out of Nature's first inexorable law in the atmosphere of Paradise Alley.

After its plunge down the street, the snow-battle swerved back to the starting point. Sis was still the center of operations, fighting silently, but with the steadiness of a well-regulated projectile-propelling machine.

"You better give me my dog!" John Preston spoke sullenly. He was tired, as were the

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other boys, for buttoned into heavy overcoats, gloved and be-leggined as they were, their excess baggage was beginning to tell on them in the struggle with their scantily-clad opponents.

"Just you come and get him!" chanted Jinks, tilting his chin as gamely as though he was not numb with cold and panting with a weariness intensified by emptiness.

"You better git out of here, all of you! If you don't we are going to let snow balls alone and take to fists. Then we'll claw your jaw, and pinch your year, and chunk you in the stummick so hard you'll wish you never had gone and got yourselves born!" Sis shook her head threateningly as she tossed aside a handful of snow. "I mean it. I'm plum wore out fooling with you!" Her eyes blazing with the light of battle, her hands doubled up into two fists that were performing an unpleasant rotary movement around each other, she danced sidewise towards John Preston.

The up-town boys fell back at her approach.

"Aw, I say, John! Who wants an old, lame dog any way! All the run's out of him. Come on and let's go to the river and skate!" Jimmy shook the snow off his cap and turned towards the

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corner that led to the main street. The others followed, John turning to throw a dark glance at Jinks. He muttered a few threats, but they were subdued.

All the crowd eyed Sis askance, as she stood in the middle of the street, her tatters fluttering in the wind. They had had past experiences with her when she "took to fists."

"Get erlong! Get erlong!" cried Jinks with a derisive crow. He followed the command with a shower of Paradise Alley epithets that made little Billy King grow pop-eyed with a horror that propelled him around the corner and out of sight at a staggy trot.

Sis wiped her wet, purple hands on her skirt and turned towards Jinks. He was standing in the gutter, his feet far apart, and the dog in his arms.

He cocked a good-comradely blue eye at Sis when she paused beside him, and presented her with so beamy a grin that it quite obliterated the dirtiness of his face and the raggedness of his clothes. "You are just the dandy chap in a fight, Sis!" The honest admiration in his voice was in no wise dampened by the fact that he had often

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suffered severely from his companion's pugilistic powers.

"Huh!" Sis turned the shiver that shook her from teeth to toes into a careless shrug. "The downest side's always mine, and I pick it as I come. I can light a fighting then, and not lose no time a choosing."

"Just you look at the dog, Sis. Ain't he the sandiest little cuss ever you saw? All o' him wagging's hard's ever it can. Think of having any wag left in you after being run on three legs, and a tin can tied to your tail!"

"He's an awful pretty dog, Jinks." Sis touched the broken paw that rested on Jinks' ragged sleeve with fingers grown very gentle. "Let's set down and see how bad he's hurt," she said. Her voice had lost its edge, her great, gray eyes their battle fire. They were soft and brooding as she returned the friendly grin the dog gave her with a sudden, flashing smile that quite transformed her little, dark face.

"All right. We can set here as well as anywhere else, and you tie him up." As he spoke Jinks sat flat down in the gutter, unmindful of the ice and snow.

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Without demur Sis took her place at his side, and the red and the black heads at once bent absorbedly over the silky brown one.

CHAPTER TWO

"What this dog needs, and needs just awful bad, is to be tied up good and tight," said Sis with an emphatic nod of her fly-away locks. At her words, spoken in a tone of command, Jinks grew visibly depressed. He stared at his small companion in silence for a second, then a wriggle shook his skinny little form that was more from internal pain than external cold.

"He'd ought to be tied up good and tight right away, I guess," he said in a tone that indicated an unvoiced hope lying behind the uttered words.

Sis nodded vigorous assent to the question. "I've got all the dirt washed out of his paw and the bones fixed just beautiful. I know they are for they don't scrunch any more, and he don't yell when I touch it either. All he needs now is to be tied up tight so's he can't come loose inside of his skin."

Like two ragged little frogs Jinks and Sis sat

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in the gutter on either side of the suffering dog. He had been carefully placed on Sis's outspread skirt that he might not feel the iciness of the snow upon which the children sat with a philosophical unconcern resulting from long familiarity with the discomforts of street life. They were both unconscious of the bitter cold as they bent with eager intentness over their patient. The dog also had evinced a deep and becoming interest in the prolonged examination of his injuries. He had licked Sis's dirty, ministering fingers in an ecstasy of friendliness as she skillfully adjusted the broken bones, and, that Jinks might not feel slighted, he had at once extended his uninjured paw for a handshake. He was too well-bred a little gentleman willfully to hurt any one's feelings.

"Sand! My eye, Sis! Ain't he just plum full to busting with it, as well as wag?" Jinks beamed, the pride of possession sending a faint tinge of color to his face that had grown pinched and blue with the cold.

"The sand and wag are both there all right, but what he needs is to be tied up, I tell you!" returned Sis emphatically, her practical tone bringing Jinks back to the realities of the case with such

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a jolt that he sat up straight in the snow, and stared at her with wide, troubled blue eyes.

"I say, Sis, where you think we are going to get even a stitch to put on him?" he demanded, his depression growing so deep he was almost lost in the murkiness of it.

"I don't know,—when it comes to stitches, Jinks, I just don't know." Sis's small face reflected the deep gloom on Jinks'. She shook her head, then got slowly to her feet. "Cross my heart, Jinks, I just dassent tear off another scrap in front, though maybe I can manage to spare some from behind." She nearly dislocated her skinny little neck as she spoke in an endeavor to get a rear view of her skimpy skirts. "You look real hard now as I go round, and see if you can find a loose end flying anywhere."

Jinks clasped his hands about his knees and surveyed her critically as she slowly revolved before him. His freckled face was all a-pucker, and the interest in his eyes was so intense that it was akin to pain. "You are right,—you just dassent," he said mournfully. "Cause I tell you for true, Sis, if you do take off even a string more, you'll be plum in your skin."

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Sis nodded. "And skin ain't a mite of good for keeping the cold out of you," said she in the tone of one who knew.

Jinks gave her another critical glance as she sat down in the snow and lifted the dog into her lap. "You don't seem to have on as much as you did yesterday," he said.

"I ain't," returned Sis. "I tore off all I could spare to tie up Andy Jackson Banny's finger. He mashed it in the door plum awful to-day. That makes five he's got tied up at once."

"Ain't nobody in Paradise Alley ever had that many sore fingers before," said Jinks, interest in the afflictions of Andy driving away for a second the gloom engendered by the lack of a loose end on Sis.

"Well, I'm real pleased for Andy Jackson. It's just grand for the Bannys to have enough of something one time 'sides children. Maudine's real uppety about it, for her being cross-eyed and seeing things double, she's seen ten sore fingers on Andy at once. I told her while I was a-tying him up that if she got any uppetier I'd settle her good and plenty. I'd just as soon pinch her year and claw her jaw and chunk her in the stummick

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as not, for I ain't going to stand any foolishness from that Maudine! Not a mite!"

A heavy sigh was discharged from Jinks' lips in the form of a tiny gray cloud. "I just wish Andy had waited until to-morrow to get himself mashed," he said. "Then we could have tied the dog up in your scraps."

"Ain't you got nothing yourself you can spare?" Sis demanded, turning a calculating eye upon her companion.

Jinks passed an investigating hand over his own ragged clothing. The search was thorough, but necessarily brief. He sighed again. "I ain't double anywhere, Sis, cross-my-heart I ain't! If I pull off a single piece there won't be nothing but me left under the hole." Jinks shook his head; Sis shook hers; and, that he might seem to take a proper interest in the consultation, the dog wagged the tip of a curly, brown tail.

"Ain't he got sense, though!" Again Jinks' beams obliterated the blighting marks of the cold.

"He's a plum lovely dog," replied Sis. "But I tell you, Jinks, he's gotter be tied up!"

A broad grin suddenly spread over Jinks' small freckled face. In his eyes there flashed the light

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of inspiration. "Just you wait!" he said. As he spoke he ducked his head, and dived down his back with both hands.

"I say, what's the matter with you?" demanded Sis, staring with lively curiosity at the ragged bundle before her, which was going through a series of queer contortions, not unlike those of a four-legged snake trying to skin itself. "What you trying to turn yourself inside outside for?"

"I'm a-tearing out a piece of my shirt in the back to tie up the dog," came in smothered tones from the pit of Jinks' stomach. "I'm getting it from behind so's I can't see the hole, and then I won't be knowing all the time how awful cold I am." And having unknowingly voiced the great psychological fact that the consciousness of things intensifies the effect, Jinks continued his efforts at apparent self-cuticle-removing.

Sis watched him silently a moment; then, as thorough understanding came to her, her great gray eyes softened, and her close-shut lips curved, and she sat a second looking down the wide, white street, one little purple hand smoothing the dog, the other pushing back the mass of dark hair that the wind blew across her face. "It ain't the eye-

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seeing part that hurts the worst, Jinks," she said in a low tone as he passed her the dirty scrap he had secured. "It's the knowing things right in your very own middle where you ain't got any eyes,—at least where you ain't got any that you look with. I shut the door tight sometimes, so's I can't see how drunk Granny is, and set on the step outside. But I know all the time right in my inside, and that's a lot harder know than if I was right there looking at her."

"Well, I ain't going to mind about being some colder in my back if it'll just tie the dog up, and get him all mended together again so's he'll stick and can run same's other dogs can," said Jinks, grinning cheerfully. "I'll be seeing him so hard all the time now I've got him, Sis, I ain't going to have no time to be knowing about the cold hole he's made." All the boy's gloom had disappeared. He beamed at Sis like a little, red-haired gargoyle as she skillfully bound up the broken paw.

Jinks' path since babyhood had vibrated between the gutter by day and empty boxes by night, and yet, in some strange way, he had kept deep within him a stream of pure heart-sunshine. At

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the least encouragement this inside light shone out brilliantly, penetrating through the thick coating of dirt and defiance that he had annexed during his ten years in Paradise Alley.

As he sat looking from Sis to the dog and back again, the warmth that was all a-bubble within him permeated the air until Sis felt its influence, and smiled genially as they arose to their feet after tying the last knot in the rag about the broken paw.

"He's all right now," she said, patting the curly head that popped out from under the shelter of Jinks' jacket to bestow a facetious grin on her. "In a week he'll be as good as new. I just know he will, Jinks, by the feel I got in my middle."

"Where we going to now?" asked Jinks as they stood facing each other on the sidewalk, the wind cutting with knife-like keenness through their rags.

Sis shrugged her shoulders and shook back her dark elf-locks. "Not nowhere," she said. "There just ain't nowhere to go, Jinks, 'cepting the store windows, and it's so awful cold for them. Looking in 'em makes you just get raggedier and raggedier and frozer and frozer. It's

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because it's Christmas, I guess, that they look so warm they make you cold plum down to the middle of your stummick."

Jinks turned a shrewd, blue eye on his companion. "Your grammar drunk again?" he asked.

Sis nodded. "Sure. All the way through, 'specially in her legs. Came in this morning full, and she's been drinking hard all day."

"Put you out?" asked Jinks, lively sympathy in his voice.

"Didn't I tell you it was 'specially in her legs? She kicked me out, half-way down the stairs." Sis spoke with the cheerfulness of one stating an occurrence that had grown too common to be of any special moment. "As I was started, I just went on down the other half to Mrs. Banny's. That's how come I found out about Andy Jackson's finger, and gave him a piece of me to tie himself up in. There ain't even rags at the Bannys'."

"I say, Sis — are they still looking for Santa Claus to come to-night?" The eagerness in Jinks' eyes cooled a little beneath the matter-of-fact nod Sis gave him.

"Of course, they are. Maudine's an awful

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pig, too, that's what she is, for seeing double like she does she's so took up with what she'll get, she's hung up the biggest bag in the bunch!"

"I wonder if he'll come,— I just wonder if he will! I say, Sis, did he ever go to your room?" Jinks huddled his tattered jacket about the shivering dog, and came close to Sis, his eyes big and wide with the mightiness of the question within.

"No, he never!" retorted Sis shortly. "Nothing and nobody ever did come to my room 'cept the perlice to take Granny off to the station-house."

"He never has been to mine either." Jinks spoke wistfully, then his face brightened with a new thought that had popped up from somewhere in his interior. "But, Sis, maybe it's because he didn't know how to get in boxes and barrels where me'n' Tommy lives mostly. And we ain't ever had any stockings for him to put things in either. Even our legs can't hardly stay in 'em for they are all busted through. I say, Sis, do you think it's so, about Santa Claus, you know?" Jinks' face was strained and anxious, as he waited for the reply.

Sis stood on one foot, scratching the leg of the other with the toe of her ragged shoe. Her face

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had lost its defiance, her weirdly beautiful eyes their hardness. She turned a glance on Jinks that the boy knew sub-consciously did not see him at all. She seemed to be looking intently at something that lay deep within.

A beaming smile tucked up the corners of Jinks' mouth. He knew that look,—every child in Paradise Alley knew it. It meant that very soon stories would come pouring from Sis's lips so fast the words literally tumbled over each other in their haste to be uttered: wonderful stories they were, too, strange and improbable, but whose very wildness bore the ragged crowd hanging on her words to regions so far removed from the cold and filth of Paradise Alley, that their return was usually such a severe mental bump it came close to being a tragedy.

"I say, Sis," hinted Jinks, twitching her sleeve. He had a vivid memory of past experiences. "Don't you sail too high! When you get a big go on you we has to come far down and I always feel like I done bit my tongue, though I know I ain't, when I light."

"I was s'posing a lovely lady and a beautiful Santa Claus, and here you come, Jinks, butting

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right in and busting my s'pose into scraps." Sis snapped, the dreaminess gone from her eyes and the smile from her lips. "I don't see why you can't keep yourself quiet while folks are doing 'em a s'pose right in their very own inside!"

"Well, I wanted you to come on back here and tell me if you believe there's a Santa Claus for true. And you looked that batty I just knew you'd done flew plum out the top of your head. What you think, Sis, is there one, do you guess?"

"I dunno! But when I heard about it I just said there and then that the Bannys are going to have a try for it any way. It made me have a little happy singing in my middle to think of their getting something free besides children—'specially seeing Providence has already sent a visitation of them to poor Mrs. Banny."

"Well," comforted Jinks. "They can have a try at the maybe any way, and if it don't work they'll know you did your best for 'em, Sis."

Sis's face brightened. She threw a very kind glance at the small freckled face before her with the brown dog's head bobbing close under its chin. "You are the very understandingest person ever

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I did see, Jinks," she said graciously. "I hope awful hard Santa Claus will come to our Alley and if he does maybe — maybe — oh, my, Jinks, just s'posin' he was to bring you a coat and me a cloak?" Sis's eyes had taken on their dreamy look again, when Jinks brought her back to realities with a resounding thump on her back.

"Stop it!" he snorted. "You done flewed enough for to-day. You come right on back here where I'm at, and let's go somewhere! It's getting colder and later and darker every minute!"

"What'll we do, and where'll we go?" demanded Sis, returning Jinks' thump with a stinging slap on his shoulder that made him stagger.

"I dunno," said Jinks, rubbing his shoulder. "It's getting colder and colder every minute like I told you, and it's the kind of cold that just chews right straight into your inside and you can't get away from it, no matter how hard you try." There was the tragic finality born of certain knowledge in Jinks' tone. He thrust one red hand into a ragged pocket and with the other clasped the dog under his jacket close.

Sis fastened a keen glance on Jinks. There was eager expectancy growing in her eyes, and a

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very great longing was in her voice when she spoke. "What you got to tell, Jinks? I'd most forgot all about that. Though I ain't believing it's much, or else you'd a spilt it out before this. If I'd knowed something good to tell I'd 'a' been swoll up so tight with it by this time I know I'd 'a' busted."

Jinks looked blank. "I dunno what I know," said he. "Cross-my-heart, I don't, Sis."

"Well, you'd better find it out mighty quick or I'll punch your stummick until you think it up!" Sis's chin tilted aggressively. "What'd you yell for, then, 'fore you whistled, that's what I want to know? How I got here so quick was because I didn't have to do nothing but come, for I had done started at your yell."

"Oh-h-h-h!" Jinks suddenly beamed from ear to ear as an unexpected turn of his memory wheel brought to the surface the thing he had forgotten. "Sis, it's the plum glorisomest something ever I did know. If only the other boys ain't smole it out and et it up afore this!"

"What is it?" demanded Sis, shaking her head belligerently. "You'd better tell quick afore I jump right smack on you!"

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“You are always in such a hurry fit, Sis, you most push what a fellow knows out of him afore he gets it hitched in his knower real good! I ain’t going to spill any of it out, not a mite — not even a think, until the rest of the boys get here, I ain’t caring how hard you jump!” There was defiance in Jinks’ blue eyes, finality in his high, sweet voice.

“You gotter whistle for ’em then right now!” snapped Sis. “You gotter whistle long, and you gotter whistle loud! I’ll yell, for that’ll help to make ’em hurry their selfs up.”

Whistle and yell at once burst forth, sent by all the power the cold had left in the two children. And, that he might do his part, the brown dog thrust his curly head out of Jinks’ jacket and howled aloud.

CHAPTER THREE

“Aw, I say, Jinks, you are just jollying us! You never seen nothing good to eat in that barrel!” There was disbelief in Tommy’s voice, but longing in his dark eyes. As he spoke he shivered and then blew upon his red fingers to warm them.

Jinks shivered, too, and his teeth chattered like castanets. He was used to such things, though, and now, when the wind cut through his rags like a whip, he merely hunched his skinny shoulders up closer under his red ears and clasped the dog he held beneath his jacket in a tighter grasp. Aside from the desire to protect the soft, brown creature he had rescued, the plump, little body was deliciously warm to the half-frozen, half-starved child.

“I did see ’em in the barrel as sure as sure, Tommy! I heard ’em a-rolling in it when Mr. Flannigan put it out the door, and then when he went back inside I slipped up and looked in. And there they was, for I seen ’em and I smelt ’em

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too. And, boys, it was the plum deliciousest smell ever I smole in all my life." Jinks smacked his blue lips at memory of the described fragrance. Each boy's eye brightened. Every nose wriggled. They all came closer to Jinks.

"How many do you guess there is in the barrel, Jinks?" demanded Sis. "Do you think there'll be as much as a whole half for each one of us?"

Jinks nodded his mop of red hair vigorously. His generous supply of freckles drew up in a tight wad over his nose so broad was the delighted grin he bestowed upon the eager-faced throng around him.

"Aw, Sis, you've done forgot to-morrow's Christmas! Who'd care for just half a apple on Christmas eve?" he cried. "Sure, now, boys, there'll be nearer to two whole ones for each of us than there'll come to a measly half."

Long sighs of delight greeted this announcement of the plenty waiting for them.

"You are a brick, Jinks, that's what you are if you *are* the littlest chap in our gang. I'll say that much for you any day," said Toney Little, who in direct contradiction to his name was the

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tallest boy in the crowd. In token of his approval the big boy gave the little one a resounding clap on the shoulder. It came close to toppling Jinks over bodily, for he was both weak and tired. He had had no food all day, and in spite of the careless swagger with which he wore his rags a terrible inner ache held him in its grasp.

"I started for you, boys, just as soon as I seen 'em," he said, his chest swelling at the openly expressed approval of the older boy.

"He did," nodded Sis. "He yelled, for I heard him, but he met John Preston and had to stop to blodgy his nose."

"He'd been running a three-legged dog,—this very dog!" Jinks pulled back his jacket front and disclosed to the other boys the brown treasure snuggled within.

"He's a plum beauty." Toney was looking at him critically. "I most know, Jinks, he's a fine dog and maybe somebody's done lost him and you can get a lot of money by giving him back."

"Just you say that again, Toney Little, and I'll blodgy your nose for you same's Jinks did John Preston's!" flashed Sis. "Me'n' Jinks we tied

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that dog up, and we got that dog all mended, and we ain't going to sell him for money nor nothing!"

Sis doubled up her fists and flourished them close under Toney's nose. He grinned sheepishly and backed off. "You are such a scratchy cat, Sis!" he complained. "I just thought maybe the dog was a real fine breed—"

"He ain't no breed at all, Toney Little!" exploded Jinks. "He ain't got a single mite of breed in him anywhere! I should think you could see from his wag that he ain't nothing but just pure puppy dog all the way through!"

"Well, you tell us some more about them apples," said Toney, wisely proffering a safe subject for general conversation.

"You never took a single bite,—not one?" demanded Tommy Bates, whose mind could not grasp such self-denial. Tommy's contracted mental and spiritual outlook just then was conditioned by personal experience. He had managed to exist all day upon the scanty nourishment contained in a cold potato.

"I ain't a sneak, Tommy Bates!" retorted Jinks with fine scorn. All the filth of the street had failed to take the rare sweetness from his voice.

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The weary quaver in it now but intensified the purity of its tone. "I never so much as touched 'em with my fingers! I just filled my inside with the smole of 'em, and then I came on the run for you boys. We better go on, too, for Mr. Flannigan's so awful busy to-day in the store that we can burglar them apples as easy as grease."

"We'll get right along down there as fast as we can," said Toney briskly. He had a long, thin face, not unlike a weasel's, and his small, light eyes were never known to look at man or beast squarely. "Come on, boys, and when we pinch 'em, Jinks, I'll surely see that you get the biggest apple in the pile."

"If you don't, Toney Little, I'll claw your jaw and pinch your year until you'll wish you had!" threatened Sis with a dark glance at the tall, slim boy who led the ragged procession as it left the street and headed towards the barrel of golden promise.

Peter Flannigan owned the large store that stood on the corner leading into Paradise Alley. The front of the store was on East Lynne Street, a wide and busy thoroughfare, but the rear of the big building ran back and opened right into Para-

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dise Alley. And Paradise Alley was the toughest place in the town,—a long, narrow way reeking with crime and filth that crept through the heart of the city as might an above-ground sewer. The alley was lined on both sides with tall, lop-sided tenement houses that leaned tipsily towards each other as though desirous of whispering secrets too dark to be uttered save when the lips of the teller touched the ear of the told. High and narrow they arose, dull, foul blots against the blue sky, their broken windows stuffed with rags, their narrow doorways open always to allow the coming in and the going out of men and women whose faces silently proclaimed them as wretched and bankrupt as were the houses.

Many children poured out of these houses into Paradise Alley; boys grown old and crime-hardened in the brief life-span of ten years, and girls whose eyes held no look of either youth or innocence, so filled were they with hunger and pain and the soul-wrecking wisdom of the city street.

Peter Flannigan was very busy that afternoon. One of his clerks had gone home ill and the big Irishman was doing his best to be in two places at once. As a result Peter was not only decidedly

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cross, he made several mistakes. One of these was when he rolled the big apple barrel out the rear door.

"Sure now, and I'll just get this pesky thing right out of me way!" snapped he when he had bumped his pet corn against the side of the barrel for the fifth time. "It goes to Misther Claybrook's in half an hour, and it can wait without until Jake comes with the wagon." The barrel was partly filled with fresh sawdust, out of which the round, polished cheeks of the big apples glowed redly as though they had been filled to the bursting point with Christmas good cheer.

Peter Flannigan thrust the barrel outside the rear door with an oath and a bang. Customers were pouring into the store demanding immediate attention, and in his haste and preoccupation he failed to note the ragged bundle leaning by a rear window, its face pressed against the glass, its blue eyes looking longingly at the brightness and warmth within. Despite the cold that was wrenching all his bones separately and collectively, Jinks' eyes were bright, his nose keen, his wits alert. Life on the street, with rags for clothing and the sky for shelter, had at least given the boy

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sharp vision and super-sensitive perceptions along certain lines. It was said by the boys of Paradise Alley, whose rags and empty stomachs had drawn them together into a brotherhood of misery, that Jinks could see a warm corner a block away and smell a piece of bread a mile.

Sis was the only feminine member of this tattered fraternity. She held her place neither by the laws of election or selection, but by the unaided power of her own fists and tongue. Toney she despised openly and very frequently articulately as well. Bud she tolerated; Tommy she liked; and Jinks she was sworn good-comrade to, unless he trampled upon her rights. On such occasions Sis promptly administered the necessary outer urge to keep him in proper subjection to petticoat rule. This punishment was meted out to him in a spirit of strict justice, according to Sis's own crude ethical ideas, and Jinks received it with proper meekness, usually taking both the chastisement and the immediate binding up of his scratches with equal submission.

The brotherhood crept down the Alley as silently as might a band of ragged ghosts, and very soon they were clustered about Peter Flannigan's

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big apple barrel like so many dilapidated fowls around a bucket full of grain.

Apples were rare treats to the boys who lived in Paradise Alley. Sometimes they succeeded in snatching one from a passing cart, but these were usually knotty and sour,—not at all like the great beauties shining and glowing in Peter Flannigan's barrel.

Besides the apples' own intrinsic value, their desirableness was increased ten-fold because they belonged to Peter Flannigan, between whom and the Paradise Alley boys a warfare of long standing and ceaseless hostilities existed. Peter's temper was peppery and, aside from their constant depredations upon his belongings, nothing afforded the small denizens of the Alley such unholy joy as to administer the very slight physical shake-up necessary to start the mental pepper flying. That it frequently landed upon their own heads in nowise diminished their impish delight in, as Jinks expressed it, "Punching the old man up to see him sizz."

Fishing the apples out of their nest proved to be very exciting work. All the ragged crowd were diving eagerly into the big treasure pot when Sis

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and Toney Little made a grab simultaneously for the largest apple. Both grimy hands touched it at the same moment, and the shrill voice of each claimant was promptly raised in a vociferous demand that the other give up the prize at once. The voices rose loud and threatening from the interior of the barrel, when other sounds brought the ragged caps and tousled heads to the surface in hot haste.

“A-h-h-h! Ye miserable little spalpeens! Sure now, and I’ll teach ye to be after robbing an honest man of his very own belongings right under his very own nose! Git out with ye, ye dirty little limbs of Satan!”

Peter Flannigan’s round, red face was shining in the open doorway, and in another instant Peter Flannigan’s stout arm was dealing blows right and left, the stout stick he carried coming down with stinging force on scantily covered backs and shoulders. He whacked vigorously, and cries of pain were mingled with bitter curses, terrible coming from the lips of children the oldest of whom was barely twelve.

“Git ye gone, and never do ye come back to me door again! Bedad, and ’tis a pretty town

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we live in when a man's very own property is stolen from him right under his very own nose on his very own door-step!" Peter choked and stamped with rage. And from the other end of the Alley came shouts of derisive laughter and shrill cries of triumph. For despite their smarting heads and shoulders, each boy had managed to get away with his stolen fruit snugly stored inside his ragged jacket.

Peter Flannigan snorted and swore when he looked into the barrel, for the beautiful apples intended for Mr. Claybrook were gone — only the sawdust remained. Then, shouldering his stick and still muttering wrathfully, he entered the store and closed the door behind him.

Jinks had been the first to flee. His thin legs were nimble and he was soon walking along East Lynne Street, staring at the front of Peter Flannigan's big store. He appeared very unconcerned and wore his dilapidated cap with a jauntiness that made a piteous mock of the rags that covered his body.

The big glass windows of the store were a constant source of fascination to the boy. All sorts of things beautiful to the eye and tempting to the

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palate were displayed there. On one side were warm coats and stout shoes, with stately yellow-haired doll ladies standing stiffly about. In the other window were beautiful boxes heaped high with candies, and great piles of luscious fruits, whose names, even, the boy staring in from the street did not know.

All about both huge windows were swinging red bells and holly wreaths. It was Christmas eve and even such inanimate things as shops are supposed at that time to share in the general good cheer, and bloom forth gaily in mistletoe and tinsel.

Jinks watched the well-dressed, prosperous throng that poured into the big store, their faces bright and eager. Then he watched them come out again, their arms piled high with bundles of all sorts,—big bundles and little bundles, fat bundles and lean bundles. But all of them, no matter whether large or small, had a Christmassy look to the boy whom Christmas had passed by ten times. Jinks had never had a bundle in all his life; and as that thought suddenly clutched him, the cold seemed to bite into the very center of his being.

"I'll sure freeze out here as stiff as a brick! I'd better be going on, or the other boys'll get all

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the best sleeping places," he muttered to himself as the street lamps began to blink and wink through the soft gloom of the early twilight. With another glance at the hurrying passers-by, another longing look in at the big, bright windows, the boy turned towards Paradise Alley.

All the jauntiness had gone from his bearing now; his ragged cap was no longer perched on the back of his brilliant head, but pulled low over his eyes. He did not walk with a swagger. In fact, by the time the rear of Peter Flannigan's store was reached, Jinks was shrunken together and moved like an old, old man.

He wandered slowly through the Alley, but it was deserted, not even Sis being visible. The brotherhood had evidently sought shelter early, their retirement hastened by the cold that was growing more intense with the deepening of the dusk.

Drawn by the queer charm that Peter's store had always had for him, Jinks at last crept back to the big apple barrel that still stood beside the rear door. It afforded some shelter from the wind, and feeling too tired to take another step he crawled behind it and crouched down.

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Inside Jinks' jacket the brown dog was protesting pitifully about the cold and hunger that he was experiencing for the first time. He had been given "bite for bite" of the one apple that had fallen to Jinks' share, but though he had accepted the proffered morsels from politeness, he had promptly spit them out again from distaste.

Jinks huddled his treasure close in his arms in a vain endeavor to still the pleading whimper that at last forced out the sob his own discomfort had had no power to wring from his lips. Blindly and impotently the boy was facing the life-old tragedy of the bread demand, and all he had to meet it with was the wisdom that ten years in the gutter had given him.

"I ain't got *nothing* I can give you, Dog!" he whispered in the soft brown ear. "Not *nothing* but my jacket, cross-my-heart I ain't! And you can't eat that, though I wishes you could, honest I do, Dog! Maybe if I roll you up in it, though, real tight you won't have room in your inside for such a big, hungry ache!" The dog's pink tongue spoke silent thanks for this kind offer, and Jinks promptly pulled the tattered garment off. The dog was quickly wrapped in the folds, only his nose

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being left out. "You'll keep better in the barrel," he was told. "And maybe, Dog,— maybe, if Santa Claus *was* to come,— and he *was* to look in the barrel,— and *was* to see you, he might give you a bone!"

Rising unsteadily to his feet Jinks reached over and laid the bundled-up dog in the barrel. Then he crouched again in the corner next to the store. He was too tired to sleep, and terrible as was the outer ache from the cold, the inner ache from hunger was far worse. He thought it was just want of food as he lay huddled in the shadow by Peter Flannigan's rear door. But Jinks was a child, a very little child, and possibly the keenest sting of pain he endured came from the fact that Christmas cheer seemed to be in the very air for everybody — except for him.

CHAPTER FOUR

The last customer had left the store, and with a sigh of deep satisfaction Peter Flannigan turned the key in the lock. His sales that day had been large,—the cash box was full, his own capacious pockets bulging. And as the clock struck twelve and the downtown chimes began to peal “Peace on Earth,” he smiled broadly to himself. Christmas was indeed a time of good cheer to him. He walked slowly through the dimly-lighted building, glancing at the various piles of merchandise with feelings of genuine affection. They were all his,—he had won them by years of hard toil, for from the position of porter he had at last become the head of a large and growing business. He was a general merchant, and by honest dealing he had achieved success.

As he walked through his store that night, Peter Flannigan thought of the years of toil that he knew lay behind him and of the years of increasing prosperity that he felt lay before him. He moved

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slowly, and as he neared the rear door he paused, his big gray head fallen forward upon his broad breast, his great hands thrust through the belt of his apron. He had suddenly become acutely conscious that he was alone — not only in the store, but in the world. He was used to loneliness, so used to it that it had become too integral a part of his nature for him to be often actively conscious of it. But this was something new, something that extended far beyond mere loneliness into a soul-gripping aloneness that made the real self lying deep within the big man writhe with a more than physical pain. Peter suddenly felt both tired and old as the realization swept over him that the piles of things about him represented his all. Christmas simply meant a time of good sales to him,—there were no little stockings to hang about his fire,—neither wife nor child shared his prosperity.

“Peace on Earth” was pealing from every church tower in the city as Peter Flannigan opened the rear door and stood on the steps. He always made the nightly rounds himself. He had never given that duty to another, and with it he had clung hard and fast to the white apron he had

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donned with such pride thirty years before. It had marked his advancement from porter to clerk in the grocery department of the big store. Prosperity had had no power to change Peter Flannigan.

The big Irishman glanced about him with keen, bright eyes. From other parts of the city came the popping of fire-crackers, but Paradise Alley was unusually quiet. Peter looked up at the stars and sighed. Then he looked down at the ground and jumped. Close against the big apple barrel by the step a little dark heap was huddled.

"And what might ye be now?" he demanded. No answer came. "Sure now, ye can speak, can't ye? Are ye a beast or is it a human that ye are?" He touched the bundle with his foot.

It stirred. "You let me alone!" came from the heap of rags now showing clearly against the snow in the moonlight.

Peter started. The words were defiant, but the voice held as clear and sweet a note as did the bells ringing out their joyous message to the sleeping world. Peter recognized it as the one that had been loudest and most prolific of threats to him that afternoon. Its unusual purity and sweetness

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had caught his attention on many occasions when Jinks had cursed him.

"Sure now, and I'll not let ye alone. I'll not leave any living creature on the ground such a night as this!" Peter spoke harshly. At the same moment he laid a brawny hand upon Jinks' shoulder. "Ye are as cold as a bit of ice, and shivering fit to loosen every joint in the body of ye! Git up!" His voice was still harsh, and the hands that pulled Jinks to his feet were far from gentle.

The boy came up fighting wildly against the powerful grasp that was drawing him towards the stream of light pouring from the open door.

"Let me go, I tell you!" he shrieked, wriggling like an eel. "I ain't going in there with you! You'll beat me and I'd rather freeze'n be beat any more. Let go, I tell you!"

"Shut up snarling, ye little varmint! Sure ye claw worse than a cat in a bag." Peter grasped Jinks by the other shoulder as he spoke. Then, exasperated by the boy's continued resistance, he held him out and shook him very much after the manner in which a big dog would shake a rat. "Take that, ye little spit-fire!" he snorted, his peppery temper all ablaze.

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"You let go!" Jinks shrieked. Mingling with his voice there came the sound of tearing cloth. The ragged shirt covering his shoulders had parted in Peter's hands, and jerking away the boy sped like the wind into the black shadows of Paradise Alley, leaving the big storekeeper staring blankly after him, a bunch of tattered cloth in either hand.

"Darn the little varmint!" exploded Peter, tossing the rags aside and turning to reënter the store. As he closed the door a wail issued from the depths of the big apple barrel. Loud and shrill it arose, the protesting voice of a dog lifted in dismal lamentation. Peter started and, softly opening the door a little way, applied one keen, gray eye to the crack.

The wail had fallen upon other ears than Peter Flannigan's. Out of the deep gloom on the other side of Paradise Alley came speeding a little ragged figure, its wobbly legs going right bravely in answer to the call of the only thing it had ever owned.

"I'm a-coming after you, Dog! Here I am." Jinks panted, diving head-foremost into the apple barrel without the slightest regard for the safety of his neck.

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“ Ah-ha ! ” muttered the big storekeeper, removing his eye from the crack and throwing the door wide open. “ Stealing of me very own saw-dust are ye, and right under me very own nose, from beside me very own door-step ! I’ll just attend to ye this time, me boy ! ” With a growl and a snort Peter seized the doubled-up figure by the first thing his fingers touched. It happened to be the belt of Jinks’ trousers, and in consequence the boy was lifted from his folded-over position on the barrel and held up in the air still bent in the center of his little anatomy.

“ You better let go of me ! ” Jinks panted. His arms clasped the dog close and were therefore ineffectual for physical manifestations, but his legs were eloquent, as was his tongue. “ You let go of me ! ” he cried, wriggling helplessly in Peter’s powerful grasp. “ And I just double dare you — to — touch — my — Dog ! ” The last words came in gasps, and Jinks suddenly ceased resisting. A strangled sound broke from his lips and his thin body shivered with a torrent of sobs,— dry, choking, terrible in a child.

“ You can beat me, Mister, if you want to,” he whispered at last, hanging a limp, inert weight in

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Peter's hands. "I ain't caring no more what you do,—I be that wore out."

"Sure now, and 'tis freezing we'll both be out here." Peter's voice had lost all its harshness. "I've no notion of hurting ye. Come into the store where the fire can thaw ye a bit." The last words astonished Peter Flannigan even more than they did Jinks. They came of their own volition,—it might be in answer to the bells.

Jinks' sobs had ceased as suddenly as they had begun. He was perfectly passive, and, very much as though he was handling a bolt of cloth, did Peter Flannigan lift him across the threshold and stand him inside the store.

Peter turned from Jinks without even giving him a glance. He locked and barred the heavy door before he took time for a good look at his guest. Peter never forgot business and already he feared some of his fine fruit had been chilled by the stream of cold air pouring through the open door.

When the man turned around the boy was just where he had placed him. He had not moved, but stood close beside the counter, the dog clasped in

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his arms, starvation, misery, degradation written large all over him. The two stared hard at each other; the man of fifty looking down with eyes keen, clear, alert, young; the boy of ten gazing back through old, old eyes, his face worn and haggard, his thin shoulders bent wearily beneath the weight of his ten short years.

"My God!" muttered Peter under his breath as something inside of him crumpled up with a keen pang. "My God! And in a Christian land we call this a child!" Aloud he asked, "And yer name now, what might it be?"

"Just Jinks," was the reply. "I uster live with old Uncle Josh sometimes before he was took to jail, and some folks call me Josh's Jinks."

"And your people?"

"I ain't got none," said Jinks with a shake of his red head, "unless you want to put in Sis and the boys."

"And who might they be?"

"Toney and Tommy and Sis,—she's the best fellow of 'em all. They live out there." The delicious warmth of the store and the kindness in Peter Flannigan's voice and eyes had brought back some of Jinks' old audacity. There was quite a

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tinge of jauntiness in the wave of his hand towards the alley.

Peter frowned. He had suffered many things many times from the boys of Paradise Alley. They were a hard and audacious crowd, and he had often vowed he would have them arrested and sent to jail. He stood for a second staring hard at the floor, a heavy frown on his brow. Then he gave another glance at Jinks. As he looked Peter jumped. From the upper end of the bundle in the boy's arms a sharp nose was thrust. A fold of the ragged jacket was draped rakishly across one side of the dog's head, eclipsing the right eye entirely. The other spoke eloquently, though, as did the friendly waving of a silky brown paw, and the broad grin he bestowed on the big store-keeper.

"Why, bless me stars!" gasped Peter. "I'll be blamed if the little chap ain't — if he ain't offering to shake hands!" And sure enough, a paw was thrust out graciously to the big man, while the increasing beaminess of the one eye and the broadness of the smile showed that again that day had the brown dog found a friend and taken him to his heart.

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Peter turned a quick glance on Jinks, wondering at his silence. The boy had felt that he was unwatched and while Peter and the dog exchanged greetings, he leaned against the counter to keep from falling. The momentary brightness had died from his face, leaving utter hopelessness behind.

Peter's eyes were keen and bright. They were also very wise. He saw and understood the exhaustion in the whole relaxed body, the famine in the large eyes.

"Are ye hungry?" he demanded so suddenly that Jinks jumped nervously.

"Hungry?" The thin shrillness of starvation drove the haunting music from the boyish tones. "Mister, I ain't never been nothing else but hungry in my life."

Again did something crumple up inside of Peter Flannigan with a queer biting pang. In another instant he had seized Jinks in his brawny hands and deposited him and the dog in the big rocker beside the roaring stove.

"Just sit ye here, now, and thaw the outside of ye," said Peter. "And while ye bake yer toes and roast yer shins, sure I'll fetch something to

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fill the inside of ye until 'tis like to bursting ye'll be! "

Peter shook the damper of the stove as he spoke, and it replied by a jovial roar and such a merry popping and crackling that it seemed to be having a private Christmas celebration of its own.

Jinks' face glowed in the red light that came from the stove's open door, then suddenly it grew white and drawn. "I say, Mister," he said, reaching out to lay fast hold of Peter's coat tail as that big man moved away. "You ain't fooling, are you? You wouldn't give me such dirt as that? I ain't had a bite of nothing but half a apple since yesterday."

"Will ye shut up, ye little varmint?" roared Peter, backing away from the grimy hand, but a great deal more from the drawn face. "Do you take me for a real brute beast now? Just ye sit stiddy with the dog and I'll soon show ye whether I'll be after fooling ye or not! "

Jinks sank back in the chair with a gasp of relief, and Peter Flannigan went away to burrow into bin after bin and box after box.

The entire building was comfortably heated by steam, but Peter Flannigan liked stoves,—their

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cheery, red eyes appealed to some home-loving part of him that was entirely subjective,—and hence it was that in the open space by the rear window stood a stove that was a very giant of its kind. Peter also liked rocking-chairs that were wide enough to accommodate his own broad girth without any undue tightness. And close by the big stove stood a huge chair with generously spreading arms, and cushions that literally exuded mental rest with bodily comfort from every gay flower petal that ornamented their apoplectic sides.

Jinks had never seen anything in all his life that seemed so wonderful to him as the big stove in Peter's store. He had often stood for hours outside the open window at night, his toes half frozen and his body blue with cold, while he stared in at what seemed to him a veritable paradise.

That he could ever enter that marvelous store had never crossed even the outer edge of his imagination. And yet, wonder of wonders, here he was,—not only in the store but curled up in a big cushioned chair directly in front of the magic stove which radiated heat from all parts of it at once! It seemed to Jinks in a dim sort of fashion

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that he must be living for a brief space in come of the stories that Sis told. He did not try to think it out. Thinking had never been much in his line anyway, his life thus far along its brief course having been taken up in feeling.

He spread out his thin hands to the heat. Then, as the warmth began to make his fingers tingle, he stretched forth a foot. He moved timidly at first, casting furtive glances about him as might a trapped animal. At last, though, both arms and legs went out in a delighted abandon that caused Peter Flannigan to bump his own head cruelly against the edge of a box. He was watching the boy, and it was when he tried to poke his head inside a box to shut out the ragged figure in the chair that he raised a big lump upon his forehead.

The heat soaked all through both boy and dog so deliciously that, despite the terrible gnawing of the hunger-pain in their empty stomachs, both the blue eyes and the brown ones soon grew heavy. Then, just as the red and the brown heads began to bob to and fro in unison, a fat, blue pot on the back of the stove started up a bubbly, little song. At the same time it sent forth a smell so delicious

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that boy and dog sat up together, their noses wriggling a prompt appreciation of the coming feast. At that moment Peter Flannigan threw wide the stove door. Then he held a long fork over the red coals, and on the end of it was impaled a slice of pink ham with a delicate, white bias fold running all around one side of it. The sizzle of the ham and its delicious odor, mingled with the fragrance and the gurgle that came from the blue pot, formed a combination that made the two in the big chair simply beam and squirm with delighted anticipation.

With eyes bright and amused, Peter Flannigan leaned his broad back against a pile of boxes and watched his small guests. Two generous plates of ham and toast had disappeared in rapid succession, and along with them had gone two cups of steaming chocolate.

Peter chuckled happily to himself. He had enjoyed preparing the simple food. He often cooked a meal on the stove when the store had been open late at night and he did not care to go out to the near-by restaurant where he boarded. To-night, though, the pleasure he usually took in preparing these impromptu meals was entirely for-

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gotten, so great was his delight in watching the famished pair in the armchair feast together.

The bells had ceased ringing, but the echo of the message they had borne lingered in the big storekeeper's heart as he stood looking at the boy and dog. Again he chuckled happily, though silently. There was a warm glow all through him, that was both new and delightful. Peter liked it, even if he did not quite understand it. He felt in a vague sort of way that he was keeping Christmas to-night for the first time in his life.

The brown dog slipped down from Jinks' knee and, with his nose on his paws, went to sleep, too full to make even the slight exertion necessary to keep his eyes from closing.

Jinks sighed as well as he could. He, too, was full, and the breath of happiness he drew was of necessity short. Very slowly he drained his second cup of chocolate. Then he peered into the bottom of the cup with intent, eager eyes. Never before had he tasted anything so delicious, and he was suddenly seized with a great curiosity as to what it was, how it was made, and how it looked.

As he bent absorbedly over the cup, the firelight fell full upon him. His hair glowed redly, and

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Peter was sure a faint pink showed in his thin cheeks.

With great care Jinks collected the last crumbs of toast, the tiniest remaining atoms of ham, and deposited them in his mouth. His fingers moved slowly, for his thoughts were evidently far away.

Peter Flannigan chuckled to himself as he watched the boy's absorbed face. The famished look had gone from his large eyes, a slight curve, almost a smile, tucked up the corners of his mouth, taking many years from his face. Peter wondered of what he was thinking so deeply.

As though in answer to the thought in Peter's mind, Jinks leaned over the arm of the chair and placed the empty plate on the floor. Then he raised a pair of eyes as blue as cornflowers to the big Irishman's. "Mister," he asked, a strange, suppressed eagerness in both face and voice, "have you ever been took to jail?"

"Hey?" gasped Peter. "Hey? To jail is it?" He came upright from the pile of boxes, his big front swelling visibly, his broad, red face growing purple. "Who — *me?*"

"Sure! Have you ever been took to jail?" nodded Jinks. "Have you ever been pinched, you

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know,— caught and shut up in the jail down by the river? ” His blue eyes were wide, his thin, worn face strained and eager.

“ Faith now, but ye do be the impudentest little cuss that ever I came across in all of me life! ” roared Peter explosively. “ In jail? *Me?* Indeed, and never a time have I seen the inside of such a place, I’ll have ye know! ”

With a sigh Jinks sank back into the generous arms of the big chair. He clasped his grimy hands across a stomach that was comfortably full for the first time in his life. “ I didn’t know,” he said in tones of the deepest disappointment. “ I just thought maybe you had been there.”

Silence reigned in the back of the store for several minutes. Then stamping hard and breathing loud, Peter picked up the empty plate and cup. He placed them on a box with a good deal of unnecessary noise.

“ Jail! *Me!* Indeed, now! ” he snorted to himself. He was decidedly ruffled and glared belligerently at Jinks’ unconscious back. Like a great many people, though, much of Peter’s wrath went out in the stamping of his feet and the blowing of his breath hard through his big nose. His anger be-

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gan to subside and in its place there came an overpowering curiosity.

He went over to the stove again by and by. Jinks was dozing in the big chair, unconscious of having given offence. The dog snored happily at his feet. The boy started up nervously when Peter paused by his side. "Is it time for us to be going, Mister?" he asked, reaching for his tattered cap. At the same time he drew the remnants of his shirt across his breast. The dog was sleeping on the ragged jacket that had dropped with him to the floor.

Peter Flannigan did not reply to Jinks' question at once. He stood by the big stove staring down at the floor. He was looking at Jinks' toes. He had not noticed them before, but now he could see nothing else and it was a generous display, for each one of the ten that nature had given the boy was boldly showing itself through the gaping rents in his shoes. Peter Flannigan shivered. Big and brawny and well clothed though he was, those ten, small red toes peering up at him sent a chill all the way through him.

"And what made ye be after asking me about the jail, eh?" he demanded, giving the damper

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such a vigorous shake that the stove roared an immediate response. Peter had never felt so cold in his life as when he looked at Jinks' toes.

Jinks dropped his cap and glanced frankly up at the big man before him. A beaming grin spread all over his small face. As he looked down Peter started. It came to him with a severe mental jolt that it was a child, and a very small child, indeed, sitting in his big chair.

"I asked you about the jail because it's the plum beautifulest place that ever was!" There was a tremor of suppressed eagerness in Jinks' voice as he spoke. "I've done heard a lot about it, and I thought you must a-learnt how to make the stuff in the cup there."

"But why the jail?" insisted Peter. "What made ye think now that it was there I had to go to learn to make a cup of chocolate?"

"Because it's the jail that's the wonderful place, Mister!" Jinks' eyes were brighter than Peter had yet seen them. "They has beds to sleep on there and when folkses can get in they has coffee to drink every day! It's hot, too, the stuff they has. Me'n' Sis ain't ever been yet, but Toney has. Onct I most got in, but the man said I was too

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little. Me'n' Sis mean to make it yet, though! Just think now, beds to sleep on and hot things to eat *every day!*"

Peter Flannigan did think. He thought so hard he could not reply, but stood staring, first at Jinks' toes, then at Jinks' face, and then at the rags that failed entirely to cover the rest of the boy.

"To think of it in a Christian land!" Peter said to himself. "Oh, the shame of it! The shame of it! A child at ten striving to break into jail for a bed and for food!"

"Is it time for me'n' the dog to be going, Mister?" Jinks asked again.

Peter's thought grew through speech into an act. "Go, is it?" he roared. "Sure, and it is not time for ye to go at all, at all! There's a place in an honest man's store for ye to sleep on, and a bit of food in an honest man's pantry for ye to eat, without the cold and the hunger making ye try to get into a prison for shelter!"

CHAPTER FIVE

The big stove was crooning a low song to itself. The light from its half-open door glowed and blinked in the semi-darkness like a huge, red eye. Jinks lay watching it. He was resting on a pile of fresh, sweet-smelling straw in the big kindling box in the corner. A soft, gray blanket was thrown over the straw, and another just like it was tucked snugly about the boy.

Down the stairs that ran to the upper floor from the right of the stove there floated the sound to which Jinks was listening. "Puffety — puffety — puf-f-f-f!" it went with the regular beat of an engine. There was nothing small about Peter Flannigan,— he was built on large lines both inwardly and outwardly, and his snore trumpeted aloud the fact that there was room and some to spare even in the nose through which the nasal music boomed.

On a huge bed in the room at the head of the stairs lay Peter sleeping blissfully and soundly. And just below him, on a pile of straw at the foot

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of the stairs, lay a small boy who had never had a soft couch to rest on before in all his life. But instead of being sound asleep he lay with wide, bright eyes, staring at the stove. He wriggled every now and then as though he rested upon a couch of thorns instead of a bed of fresh, sweet straw, covered with a blanket so soft the very touch of it sent a thrill of delight pulsing through him.

" 'Tis right here in me store that I'll be leaving ye for the night," Peter had said as he threw the bundle of straw in the kindling box, and tossed the gray blanket over it.

Jinks stared, his eyes wide and incredulous. To be left all night alone in that big store, with the magic stove radiating heat until it felt like sure-enough summer time! A strange feeling went through the child. It was something entirely new, a sensation he had never experienced before.

He lifted his eyes. They were very clear and very blue. He and Peter Flannigan looked at each other steadily for a full minute. "I won't steal a thing, Mister! Cross-my-heart I won't!" Jinks spoke huskily, the words seeming to leap from his lips without any volition of his own.

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"Sure now, and I know ye'll not," said Peter. "I trust ye." Jinks did not reply, nor did Peter say more. By long years of dealing with his fellows, the untaught man had mastered one of life's biggest lessons. He knew that the surest way to make a human soul worthy of trust is — to trust it.

Peter Flannigan went up-stairs to bed, and promptly fell asleep. Down-stairs Jinks went to bed, and promptly became wide awake. The boy's body was at ease; he was thoroughly warm, his stomach was well filled with good food. The outer, or physical, part of him was so comfortable that for the first time in his life he forgot his body entirely. And so it was that for the first time he began to hear, and recognize, the call of the inside — the real, true self — that the freezing, starving, aching outside of him had never given a chance to speak before.

"This bed don't lay right!" muttered Jinks. He went over and over as though his skinny, little form was operated by patent springs. "It's got wiggles in it plum awful!" Again he turned and twisted to and fro, at last rolling bodily upon the dog that lay in a tight, brown ball between the two gray blankets. The little creature grumbled a

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sleepy protest, then by way of mutely asking pardon and evincing such friendly interest as he could, he licked Jinks' face with a warm, moist tongue. Jinks promptly grasped him close in his arms, but even the dog's sympathy failed to still the wiggle that seemed to have attacked the boy's body all about in spots, and then united in one big, general squirm.

"You was plum froze, and he took you in and thawed you at his own stove, in his own chair, until you was as warm as the toast he give you to eat." Jinks' inside was talking to him that night for the first time, but it spoke in no uncertain tones. The boy wriggled and stared hard at the big, red eye of the stove. He did not answer back, though, for all his old, saucy assurance seemed to have suddenly deserted him.

"You was starving — you and the dog — and he filled both of you up until you was fit to bust with the ham and the toast and the good stuff in the cup." Never before had Jinks' inside had a chance at him. It was making good use of its opportunity.

Jinks wriggled some more. Then he pulled the gray blanket up over his face until he was all hid-

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den except the tip-top of his glowing head. The red hair stuck out above the roll of gray like a ragged poppy.

“Puffety — puffety — puffety — PUFF!” came floating down the stairs in a peal of jolly nasal thunder.

Jinks stuffed a finger tight into each ear. This failed to work as he had supposed it would, though, for while it shut out Peter’s chokes and snorts very effectively, the deep silence gave the talkative inside an even better chance than it had had before. Jinks had not yet learned that once the inside voice becomes audible, nothing can ever render it inarticulate again save to voluntarily block up with spirit-stifling material the channel through which the God-spark radiates into our consciousness. “He gave you a bed to sleep in,— a soft bed, too, the very first you ever did have! And it’s got a gray kiver to it, a spanking new one what he pulled right out of a box just for you and the dog!”

Jinks rooted like a mole, head-first, down into the straw. Somehow he felt what was coming next sub-consciously, and he tried to burrow so deep it could not possibly catch up with him. He

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did not know the wonderful traveling power possessed by a talkative inside!

"And he trusted you, Jinks! Trusted Josh's Jinks, what nobody ever did trust afore!"

Jinks had listened in silence to all the rest. He plucked up a little spirit now, and talked back. "Shucks! You just shut up! You think I don't know about that? Wasn't I standing right here, — me and the dog both? We seen him and heard him when he done it!"

"You do be a fine one to trust now! Oh, Jinks, but you are a bird! Ricollect who it was as busted the window out of Flannigan's store last week?"

Jinks' brilliant head popped out of the gray blanket folds. He sat up on his pile of straw, shivering, though this time it was not with cold. "I done it," he whispered to the accusing voice. "And — and — I just ever-lastingly cussed him black and blue and spotted that day, I did!"

"Sure, you did," agreed the uncompromising inside. "And you meant to bust the window, and you were mad as hops because you couldn't think up no more names to call him. And then you kicked over that whole box of lamp chimbleys, and

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you knocked Sis slap-bang right into the case of eggs! ”

Jinks' head bobbed up and down in unhappy confirmation of it all. “And they was plum squashed, them eggs, every last one of 'em,” he whimpered right into the brown dog's ear. “He didn't know it was Sis and me that done it. He thought it was Tommy. Tommy's just hell on Flannigan's eggs,—he busts every one he can find in passing.”

“That ain't all,” went on the inside voice. “To-day now,—the very day he treated you whiter than anybody ever did treat you before,—you stole his apples and you showed the other boys how they could steal 'em, too. And here you are, right in his store, by his stove, on his straw, all kivered with his gray blankets! ”

Jinks sat huddled up in the middle of the kindling box for what seemed an eternity to him. The fire died low; the dog rolled over in a warm corner to continue his interrupted slumber, and the boy was alone, staring into the darkness with wide, miserable eyes. His shoulders were hunched up, his skinny little knees drawn close under his chin. He crouched there listening to the “Puffety —

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puffety — puffety — puffs! ” floating down the stairs, until he could bear it no longer.

“ I’ve just got to do something! ” he whispered to himself at last, as a faint streak of gray peered dimly in at the rear window. “ I just got to go up there and tell him what I’ve did to him! I’ve just got to do it, because if I *am* all them things I done found out about being to-night, cross-my-heart I ain’t no sneak! ”

After seeing Jinks comfortably tucked away in the kindling box, Peter Flannigan had mounted to his room with feelings of the deepest satisfaction swelling within him. Seldom had any one ever shared his hospitality, and never before had a child slept beneath his roof.

Peter smiled a series of broad smiles to himself as he undressed. He chuckled a roundelay of chuckles as he retired beneath the warm covers of his bed. And he dreamed of children’s faces after he went to sleep, faces that at first were thin and white, but that under his ministrations grew round and rosy, and filled with the smiles and the joy-light that belong by divine right to childhood.

“ Puffety — puffety — puffety — PUF-F-F-F-

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F-F!" boomed Peter as he snored his way right joyously through dreamland.

For several hours no other sound broke into the silence of the store. From far away there came an occasional fire-cracker explosion, but all was still in the big building whose rear opened out on Paradise Alley.

"Puffety — puffety —" Peter had just started in on an unusually long-drawn puff, when it was broken off short right in the middle. With a snort and a choke he came upright in the bed. He was easily awakened, for he kept no night watchman, and at the slightest unusual sound he was on his feet. As he sat up Peter knew that somewhere down-stairs there had been a loud crash.

Silently he reached to the wall and touched the electric-button. The room was at once a blaze of light. It showed that Peter Flannigan was prepared for whatever, or whoever, might come, for a large revolver lay on the table within easy reach of his hand. He kept his cash box under the bed, and as it was always well filled he never took any chances.

Peter sat up in bed, his head on one side, listening intently. For a moment all was still, then came

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the sound of shuffling feet creeping cautiously across the floor below. Peter looked disagreeable. "Ah — sure now, and 'tis a fool I'm a thinking ye have been, Peter, me boy!" he muttered. "Ye had far better have left the little chap to starve and freeze in the Alley, for as I'm a living man that's him creeping about down below." His face changed, the frown on his brow grew blacker. The creeping footsteps were coming up the stairs. Closer and closer they approached. Then a ragged figure stood in the doorway.

"Halt, just where ye are!" rang out Peter's voice, curtly and harshly. The figure paused abruptly. A wan, grimy face was lifted, a pair of wide, blue eyes blinked uncertainly at the bright light.

"It's me, Mister, it's just Jinks," said the high, sweet treble that always made Peter Flannigan cock his ear to listen.

"Sure, and I see that it's ye,— who else would it be, now? But the thing I'd like to know is what ye be after this time of the night? First a-knock-ing of me house down, and then slipping up here to rouse an honest man out of his own sleep, in his own bed, under his own roof!" Peter's voice

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was at its harshest, Peter's frown his very blackest. His face took on an added fierceness from the brilliant red-flannel night cap that stuck straight up on his head. Peter's hair was growing thin on top and his scantily clothed crown became cold in the winter nights; so, as he always made himself thoroughly comfortable physically, he had adopted night caps.

"I — I fell over the big chair," faltered Jinks. "I was a-coming up here and I just went everlastingly ker-slap-bang right over it!"

"Sure and I heard ye! Ye made noise enough to raise the dead, without any need of the good saint tooting the last trump! And now that ye are here, what might it be that has brought ye out at such an unholy hour, eh?"

Jinks went close to the side of the big bed. He was so taken up with his inner disturbances that he failed to glance at the large, well-furnished room he was in. "Mister, it's my inside. It ain't been *a-talking* to me exactly, but it's been a-saying things,—plum, awful things! It do bother me turrible!"

Jinks turned such a woe-begone face to Peter that the big storekeeper came a bit nearer to the

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edge of the bed. He removed his flaming head-dress, much to Jinks' relief. "And is it a pain that ye have?" he asked.

"I ain't ever had nothing like it before," said Jinks, shaking his head.

Peter looked sympathetic. One of his pet hobbies was the doctoring of his friends. Peter Flannigan was a proud and a happy man when he could induce any one to take a pill or apply a plaster. "Ah-h, sure! Will ye just tell me where it has hitched itself to ye, and faith I'll give ye a dose of physic that'll very soon relieve ye."

"It's right in my inside," said Jinks. His whole ragged figure shrank together. His head drooped as it had never yet drooped before mortal man in all his ten years.

"That's fine," quoth Peter, his eyes bright with interest. He got up and sat on the side of the bed, his big, red feet dangling from beneath the generously flowing tails of his yellow flannel nightie. "Just ye show me now whereabouts in yer inside it do be a-gripping of ye the hardest."

"It's right in here. That's where it's the worstest." Jinks clasped both hands tight above

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his solar plexus, and turned a pair of wide, miserable eyes on Peter.

"Dear me, now but that's too bad! That will be the stomach of ye, I'm thinking. And what might ye be after having in yer inside, do ye suppose, to make it take ye so sudden?"

"That there winder what I broke last week," burst out Jinks explosively. "And all them times I cussed you black and blue and spotted,—and that there box of lamp chimbleys I busted,—and them eggs I squashed. I knocked Sis into 'em, and she just ever-lastingly lit a-settin', and never left a whole one in the bunch! And them apples I swiped from you to-day, and helped the other boys to swipe,—and the gray kiver for me and the dog,—and the ham you give to us—" As the boy paused for lack of breath to go on, Peter gasped, then sat very still. His face had been a study as he listened to the outburst. Alarm, consternation, amusement, then, at the last, comprehension passed in quick succession across his broad countenance.

Peter sat staring down at the ragged pile into which Jinks had huddled close beside his feet. This was another than the Paradise Alley imp of

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Peter's previous acquaintance,—nor was it the famished little animal he had fed beside the stove a few hours before. The quivering, sobbing heap on the floor was a child,—a forlorn, unloved, untaught child,—battling with a mighty inner force he did not understand, and all unconscious as yet of the great gift, the divine gift of the higher self which he was now coming into conscious possession of for the first time.

Peter Flannigan's big heart understood, although but dimly. "Sure now, son, it's no wonder that ye felt ailing with all that in the inside of ye," he said. The deep voice was so kind that Jinks glanced up timidly from where he crouched. At something he saw in the keen eyes bent upon him, the boy reached out and laid a grimy hand upon Peter's yellow-flannel-covered knee. "It's all out of ye now, Jinks, every last scrap of it; be ye very sure of that, me boy. And I'll say this for ye,—ye did it like a man,—a clean man at that! Get ye up now and go back to bed. We'll just say no more about what has been, but we'll keep a sharp lookout to see that what's clean stays that same."

Jinks got slowly to his feet. 'As he arose he

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wavered uncertainly to and fro, and but for the hand that still clung to Peter's knee, he would have fallen. He had suddenly grown too tired to stand.

"Sure now, and 'tis worn to a fiddle-string that ye are," Peter said. And though the room was going around in a giddy dance, Jinks looked up and his half-closed eyes opened wide and bright at the wonderful gentleness of Peter's voice. "Just rest ye here on the couch until the morning. Then we'll have a try at getting the outside of ye as clean as ye swept the inside to-night."

Peter Flannigan lifted the boy's slight figure in his strong arms as he spoke and carried him across the room to a wide couch. Placing him among the great pile of pillows he covered him closely with a heavy comfort that he took from the foot of his own bed.

"And what might be the trouble with ye now?" demanded Peter, turning around in the middle of the room on his way to bed. For no sooner was Jinks deposited on the couch, than he began to get up again.

Jinks raised a pair of dim, but surprised eyes. "It's my dog," he said simply. "Mister, I ain't

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ever had a dog before, and I got to go get him."

The boy was zig-zagging towards the door on unsteady feet when Peter's big hand fell upon his shoulder.

"Just ye get back to where ye came from, or ye'll be falling and cracking yer head; for bedad, ye are as trembly in yer legs as an old man. I'll get the dog!"

Jinks obediently returned to the couch, and thrusting his big feet into a pair of gay carpet slippers, Peter Flannigan stalked majestically down the stairs to bring up his other guest.

CHAPTER SIX

On Christmas morning Peter Flannigan was up and bustling about the store bright and early. He dressed quietly when the first sun-ray peered in at his open window, and slipping out left Jinks utterly unconscious that daylight again shone upon the world of men. The boy was still closely rolled in the heavy coverings Peter had tucked about him several hours before. So far as the big man could tell, he had not moved even a finger since he had clasped the dog close in his arms on Peter's return and then crumpled up among the crimson cushions with a long sigh of utter mental and physical weariness.

The brown dog stirred slightly when Peter walked over to the couch, and, peering out from under Jinks' chin, winked a friendly eye at the keen gray ones looking down upon him. Then, with a slight waggle of his soft ears, and a wide, pink yawn, he snuggled back cozily, and was instantly as sound asleep as the boy.

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Peter stood for a long, long time beside the low couch that morning, his hands thrust in his pockets, the bushy brows drawn together across his big nose, and his gray eyes studying the face resting among the soft cushions. In the relaxation of deep sleep, the boyish countenance showed plainly its sad hollows and sharp angles. Peter looked long at the dark shadows under the eyes; his searching glance noted the weary curve of the sensitive lips now that they were no longer tucked up at the corners by Jinks' impish grin. The big man studied each feature carefully, thoughtfully. He saw how soft and fine the red hair was, how the brow it waved back from was both wide and high. The nose and mouth were well cut, the chin sharply enough defined to promise will power sufficient — if rightly directed — to make good use of the high mental and spiritual qualities that the upper half of the face clearly indicated. There was a tiny dent in the center of the square chin, Peter noted with secret satisfaction, and as he marched down-stairs a few moments later, he thought to himself that when sufficient food had rounded out a few of Jinks' corners he might develop a very roguish dimple.

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Peter Flannigan's brow was puckered and his mouth pursed up, as though pulled tight with a gathering string, as he boiled the water for coffee that morning and sliced the bread and ham. He seemed to have no intention of going out for breakfast, and dismissed the porter as soon as the furnace was looked after and the store swept. He also blinked inhospitably through the half-open rear door at the little caretaker when she came, and told her his room would need nothing that day. To both the dingy little woman and the big negro Peter presented a substantial gift of money, and then closed the door behind them with a sigh of the deepest satisfaction. He evidently had some plan on hand that he wished to work out alone and in strict privacy.

Peter began his preparations for breakfast by spreading a sheet of clean white paper on top of a big box that he drew up close to the glowing stove. Then he went to the china department and rummaged about a long time, whistling happily to himself as he searched for the particular thing that he desired. By and by he came back to the stove bearing a gay cup and saucer in one hand and a flowered plate in the other. These

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he placed on one side of the box and stood back to admire them, laughing bashfully at himself as he leaned over twice to straighten the plate and put the cup in the exact center of the saucer.

A large platter filled with his finest fruit was next deposited on the box, exactly in the middle, where it stood noble guard over several packages of fire-crackers that he had arranged in an artistic semicircle about the brilliantly flowered plate. A second trip to the china department added a plump glass bowl to the box's decorations. This was piled high with candies and nuts and, when topped off with a big bunch of holly, formed the crowning glory of Peter's Christmas feast.

After standing with his head on one side a few seconds to admire the result of his handiwork, Peter fried his ham and made his coffee and buttered his toast, and wound up by cooking several eggs as the last part of the coming celebration.

"Sure, and never before have I had a Christmas since I was a kid in petticoats," he said to himself, as he brushed his coat carefully and tied a clean apron across his wide front. "And last night was the first time in all me life that a Christ-

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mas eve prisint ever came a-knocking right at me very own door ! ”

Peter shook his shaggy gray head and stood before the stove, so lost in some thought he was grappling with that he burned a piece of bread to a cinder. “ I may be a dunder-headed old fool, but for all that ’tis meself that’s thinking of having a try at it,” he muttered as he absent-mindedly bit a half moon out of the blackened toast he still held in his hand.

The big, white-faced clock on the wall ticked away half an hour, and still Peter Flannigan stood before the stove thoughtfully scratching the end of his bottle nose with the handle of the toasting fork. Suddenly he was roused out of his reverie by a joyous bark up-stairs, mingled with a ringing, boyish laugh. Peter’s broad, red face crinkled up into a beaming smile, and he cocked his gray head on one side to listen to what was evidently a waking-up frolic, and, as the unusual sounds floated down into the store, his great bulk shook with sympathetic mirth as though in the grasp of some subterranean earthquake. “ Whist now,” he chuckled, winking confidentially at the toasting fork ; “ will ye but listen to ’em, the little divils ! ”

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Then, as the rapid patter of feet sounded on the narrow stairs, he nodded his head and added to himself, "Mayhap after all the fools in the world lay grip to bits of heart-wisdom once in so often that the clever ones never set eyes on at-all, at-all."

Surely in all the city there was not such another Christmas breakfast as was the one served on top of a dry-goods box in the big store whose rear end opened into Paradise Alley! And surely in all the city no holiday feast was so thoroughly enjoyed as was this same breakfast by the old Irishman who sat on one side of the box as host, and by the gutter child who sat on the other as guest, while on all sides was the brown dog, his interest keeping pace with his appetite, neither flagging from start to finish.

Jinks was astonished at how hungry he was. And Peter Flannigan was astonished, and right joyful as well, at the truly marvelous amount of bread and ham and eggs and fruit that the small boy managed to make away with.

"Mister, I just know for true they ain't got things as nice as these at the jail," confided Jinks, giving the feast the highest praise his limited ex-

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perience enabled him to bestow. He had pushed his chair back and was gazing with wide, bright eyes at the greatly diminished pile of fruit in the center of the board. As he looked up to smile at Peter, the big man told himself that it would not take many such meals as this to make the dimple in Jinks' chin grow, or rather deepen, into a reality.

"Ye don't find things such as we have in jails, son." Peter had risen from his chair and stood beside the box looking down at the boy with grave, puzzled eyes. He spoke slowly, hesitatingly, his mind reaching forth gropingly after the best path to follow in uprooting the jail-kink from where it had adhered to Jinks' mentality. "The jail is a place where only those are put who have let the dirt from without soak all the way in and then stick there, hard and fast. Folks with clean insides never enter the jail doors, Jinks, unless —" Peter sat down suddenly, his mouth open. Something had popped into his consciousness with an unexpectedness that made him bat his eyes as from a blow.—"Unless, sonny, they have found a kind of a-a broom, as ye might call it, that they wanted to pass along for the other poor souls to sweep the

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trash piles out of their insides with,—just as ye did last night.”

Jinks nodded. He did not quite understand, but then neither did Peter,—entirely. The faint shadow of a great life-truth had fallen dimly across the inner vision of the big Irishman, and in a half-blind fashion he had tried to follow its lead by passing it on to the child so strangely thrown under his roof.

Peter soon hustled off to wait on a stray customer or two, and Jinks and the brown dog sat in the big chair before the stove, the one asleep, the other very wide awake.

There was none of the watchful distrustfulness of the night before in Jinks' manner now. That spiritual natal hour in the gray dawn, when the heart of the lonely child had sought and found the heart of the lonely man, had laid forever the fear demon in Jinks towards Peter Flannigan. He had accepted his breakfast with the same unquestioning, matter-of-course manner in which the brown dog had asked for and received his. After Peter went his busy way, Jinks had stood for awhile before the stove, and then with the ease that a duckling takes to a puddle, he had clasped the

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dog in his arms and curled up in the big armchair, to bask again in the wonderful heat to which his inside and his outside both responded gratefully.

With a wisdom far beyond his years, the boy had dropped the past like a garment cast aside. To the future he as yet gave no thought, but accepted the present with no wonderings as to the whats or the whys of it to disturb his perfect content. It is thus that children often grasp naturally and unconsciously in their entirety the deepest philosophical and psychological truths, over whose workings out gray-beards have vainly tied knots in their brains. The reason for this is, perchance, that the greatest truths are ever the simplest, and when they appear obscure they are merely rendered so by the mental genuflections of those who come searching for them.

Shortly after breakfast on Christmas morning Peter Flannigan was seized by a great desire to explore boxes. He had stood looking Jinks over in thoughtful silence for several minutes, and then with a head shake had retired to that section of the big store sacred to ready-made clothing for men and boys. Peter seldom entered this part of the building, and as he pawed his impatient way

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through box after box, leaving wild confusion in his wake, the bewilderment on his red face grew so deep as to be tragic. The more he looked the less he knew, and at last he tossed a pile of clothing aside with a groan of despair and a snort of indignation.

“Sure now, and how I’ll ever get the size and the shape of him and the covering to go on him to match at all, at all?” he grumbled, holding aloft a pair of trousers that were large enough for a giant, in one hand, and flourishing an infant’s sweater in the other. “If the boy was but potatoes now, faith, I could get the size of him exact in the peck measure! And if his shock of red hair was bacon, ’tis meself that could trim it up so neat it would make any one’s mouth water but to look at it. But a boy now — what one does be after wearing beats me, as well as the largeness and the smallness, both of him and of the covering to him!”

Peter stared up at the ceiling seeking help; and finding none, he groaned. Then he propped his chin in his hand, and leaning against the garment-strewn counter pondered the puzzling question deeply. That he thought long and thought hard

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was shown by the anxious pucker between his eyes that drew his bushy brows together until they met over his big nose. Several times he shook his head hopelessly, then suddenly his face began to beam and his eyes to twinkle as though a lamp had been lighted somewhere in his interior.

Like a flash, inspiration had come to him. Mrs. Banny, the little caretaker who had cleaned his room daily for the past three years! She might or might not have a family, but she was a woman, and Peter felt intuitively that the problem his masculine wits were struggling vainly to solve, was one that required not only a woman's wisdom, but a woman's experience as well. He would pass Jinks over to Mrs. Banny to do with as she might think best! Peter beamed and twinkled and rubbed his hands together in self-congratulation. So completely had the thought of Mrs. Banny clarified his mental atmosphere, that he felt as though his mind had sneezed.

"And do ye be after knowing just w'ere it is that Mistress Banny lives, Jinks?" Peter demanded a few moments later, marching briskly into the rear of the store. Jinks looked up from his nest in the big chair, his eyes wide and bright.

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His glowing top-knot nodded a complete knowledge of Mrs. Banny's whereabouts.

"She lives right down the Alley, in the house what's got the crookedest top and the dirtiest everything, sixth floor, back," he explained glibly.

"Well, 'tis right straight to Mistress Banny that we'll be a-going," said Peter, reaching for his hat and coat as he spoke.

"Sure, now that ye have gotten the inside of ye clean and neat, we must be after getting yer outside scrubbed up to go with it. It's always safest, me boy, to have all yer parts so trimmed that they'll match perfect." Peter shook his big head wisely. Jinks at once shook his head assentingly, and the brown dog sat up on his hind legs and held out a paw to shake hands, in token of his thorough approval of Peter and of Peter's views upon all things as well.

"We'll have to rest here a bit, son."

As Peter Flannigan spoke, he and Jinks reached the foot of the fifth flight of stairs in the dingiest tenement on Paradise Alley, and the big store-keeper paused with a puff and a wheeze. He leaned against the tipsy banisters, panting for the



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breath he had lost in the climb up the almost perpendicular steps that lay behind them.

Jinks peered eagerly up the dim length of long, ladder-like stairs that extended into the gloom of the next floor. He grinned broadly as he spied a dark bundle on the top step. "There's Sis!" he announced, nodding his head upward.

Peter frowned darkly. "Sis!" said he in his deepest bass. "Sure now, and there's not such another little limb in all Paradise Alley as that Sis!"

Jinks promptly backed off until he brought up against the wall, and the admiring friendliness with which he had been regarding Peter all morning vanished from his small, freckled face. Hostility began to gather in his blue eyes. "Sis is — Sis is just the bang-upest, bulliest chap a-going! And I double-dare anybody to say she ain't! Cross-my-heart I do!" he blazed, his tone so belligerent that at sound of it Peter Flannigan jumped entirely out of his abstraction and landed right in the middle of present conditions. He stared down to find a pair of big eyes several feet beneath his own emitting blue sparks, and Jinks' meager front swelling wrathfully.

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"Sure, and 'tis meself that has had experience of her along with the rest of ye," exploded Peter, his peppery temper beginning to sizzle. "And I'll say this for her, she's the worst in the whole bunch! Such a tongue never have I come across in all me born days!" The memory of the many things he had endured at the hands of the Paradise Alley crowd brought a heavy frown to Peter's brow and a spark of fire to his keen eyes.

Jinks did not reply at once to the big man's explosion. He stood puffing himself out like a pouter pigeon when he glanced up towards where he felt, rather than saw, Sis on the stairs; and then frowning perplexedly as he looked at Peter.

"Sis — Sis ain't — at least all of Sis ain't — what you think, if the rest of her is!" he burst forth at last, floundering hopelessly as he tried to grasp the idea that slipped like an eel through his mental fingers.

"Oh!" said Peter, blankly, staring down into the small, anxious face raised to his. "So you think she isn't, eh?"

Jinks shook his head. "She ain't," he insisted. "I know she ain't what you think, though she is plum scary when she jumps right slap-bang on

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you and claws your jaw and chunks you in the stummick! But you see, Mr. Flannigan, you ain't *ever, never* seen Sis's inside!"

Peter's broad bulk shook. All the anger had died from his face and his eyes were very kind as they met the blue ones staring up at him. "No," said he, "I haven't seen her inside! And sure, if it is like the outside of her, 't isn't meself that cares to!"

"That's it!" beamed Jinks passing over the last part of Peter's remark entirely and grasping the first. "That's just plum it! You wait until you see Sis's inside, then you'll know!"

"All right," agreed Peter. "I'll wait, son! And now that I've caught a bit of me breath again, suppose we climb on up and try to find Mistress Banny."

Jinks scampered up the uneven stairs with a sureness of foot and celerity of movement that indicated thorough familiarity with his surroundings. Peter followed ponderously behind his small guide, the narrow stairs creaking and complaining dismally beneath his heavy tread.

Sis sat huddled on the top step with her elbows on her knees, her chin in her palms, and her whole

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being sunk in such deep gloom that it literally exuded from her in an almost visible halo of despair. At the sound of approaching footsteps she did not look up, but merely contracted herself into a tighter ball and shrank a little closer to the wall, that the intruders might have room to pass.

Jinks paused, his head on a level with Sis's drawn-up knees. "You Sis! Come right straight down out of where you have flewed to!" he ordered, giving her a poke in the ribs with his fist that was vigorous enough to call her soaring imagination back to earth from even celestial heights.

Sis looked up silently in response to this friendly greeting, but with none of the usual aggressiveness in her glance. There was no light in the big, gray eyes that met Jinks' blue ones; they were dark, almost black with gloom. She said nothing.

Jinks gave the small, huddled-up figure a quick glance. It was bright and shrewd with a knowledge of many things. "Grammar still on the rampage?" he demanded, his interest so deep that he forgot entirely the big man who stood behind him in the shadow.

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"She is," said Sis. "Drunk! Oh, *my!* Ain't she just!"

Jinks cocked his head on one side and eyed Sis contemplatively. "I thought you looked done-upper'n common," he said. "Seems to me, Sis, by now you'd be plum seasoned to her."

"Seasoned?" sniffed Sis, the light of battle beginning to gleam faintly in her large eyes. "I was born seasoned to Granny, but cross-my-heart, I ain't seasoned to them Bannys! Gee! I don't mind how many jigs Granny dances when the drink gets in her legs! It's them Bannys, I tell you! I've got 'em all, from Maudine down to the freshest twins, a-setting right ker-slap-bang on me!"

"Fight 'em!" suggested Jinks with a belligerent nod. "Just you hop right on 'em, Sis, and clean up the bunch! I'll help!"

"Huh!" Sis sniffed disdainfully. "They das-sent set on *me!* They are jest a-sticking to my in here!" As she spoke she spread a dirty little paw over the region of her solar plexus and raised such tragic eyes to Jinks that he sat down on the step beside her like a suddenly punctured balloon.

Jinks' unexpected move left Peter without a

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shield, and Sis's stormy eyes looked straight into his keen ones! But so weighty was the burden resting upon her ragged little shoulders that it prevented her feeling the least astonishment at Peter Flannigan's presence. Fear was a sensation totally unknown to Sis, and in the many encounters with Peter in Paradise Alley she had always danced gaily out of his reach, expressing her opinion of him in fluent terms more often and at closer range than any of the boys had ever dared do. Now she met his searching look fairly and squarely, defiance slowly beating out the gloom in her wide, beautiful eyes.

"Ye were speaking of the Bannys," said Peter. "'Tis Mistress Banny that I am seeking. Will I be after finding her above, do ye think?"

Sis nodded. "You will!" said she emphatically. "You just surely will find her above, as well as the whole bunch of 'em! They've been a-setting there ever since sun-up, and cross-my-heart-hope-I-may-die, if I don't believe they'll every last one of 'em be a-setting there until sun-down! And if Santa Claus don't get here by then, what I'm to do about it beats me!" With the last word Sis dropped her chin again in her

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palms, and resumed her interrupted inspection of her ragged toes.

"Eh?" said Peter. "Santa Claus, is it?"

"I say, Sis, did they hang 'em up?" cried Jinks excitedly. "Did they put up the paper bags?"

"Did they?" repeated Sis, then paused suddenly while she engineered her way carefully around a sob that was about to prove her undoing. "Jinks, them little Bannys, every single one, hung up a paper bag last night, since they didn't have stockings enough to go around for legs — much less for hanging."

"And I say, Sis,— didn't they get nothing? Not NOTHING?" So keen was Jinks' anxiety that he leaned far over to peer into Sis's downcast face. Peter also came up another step, an expectancy almost as great as Jinks' in his eyes.

"Not nothing!" said Sis in smothered tones. "Not a single NOTHING! Every one of them little Bannys' paper bags was a hanging there this morning as empty as empty!"

"Gee!" said Jinks.

"Poor little devils," breathed Peter.

"It was plum awful to 'em all, more 'special to the freshest twins." As Sis mentioned the young-

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est Bannys her big eyes grew soft and tender behind their long, black lashes. Her tightly-shut mouth relaxed, and the corners of her lips curled up, thereby bringing into view an almost imperceptible dimple in one brown cheek. Peter started as he looked at her. Another than the belligerent little fury familiar to Paradise Alley seemed to have crept into her meager body, and to be peering shyly out from her great, tragic eyes.

"What'd you do, Sis? Seeing 'twas you put 'em up to it, you just had to do something! Did you s'pose 'em anything?" Absolute faith in Sis's ability to find a way out of the situation was in Jinks' face and voice as he waited breathlessly for her reply.

"It was the very worst tie-up ever I did get tied in!" said Sis. "I went in real early this morning, and there set Maudine, crying, and she give me a real awful sinking in my middle, because, her being cross-eyed and seeing double, for every one of them two tears a-running along her nose she was seeing four! And poor little Pearlle was in a corner, crying, too! She never had had a doll in her arms in her whole life, so as Santa Claus was free, she asked for a sure enough one,— a big

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one, too! And she'd been sleeping in the crack between the bed and the wall for a week to keep her place smooth for the doll baby to lay in! I did the best I could for 'em! I s'posed and I s'posed,—but Gee! Six s'posers would a-gotten flatted out with all them little Bannys a-setting there holding empty bags and looking at me to s'pose 'em full! I got a ball s'posed in Andy Jackson's and there I stuck, for he bellered just awful, and said I might s'pose the ball but that I couldn't s'pose any bounce in it. And I couldn't, so after Andy bellered I come on out here where I couldn't see none of 'em, nor hear 'em either." Sis's head dropped back upon her hands, and she subsided again into the deepest gloom.

Peter Flannigan blew a trumpet-like blast on his nose. Then he coughed. "I'll go on up now to see Mistress Banny," he said hurriedly. "Ye can just wait for me here, Jinks."

Jinks and Sis watched Peter's broad back until it disappeared down the side hall that led to Mrs. Banny's door. Then they sat a moment in silence, staring at each other. Sis nodded her mop of dark hair. "I kinder like old Flannigan's smile," she said thoughtfully. "It ain't very big and it

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don't come often, but it's nice the way it sticks to his corners."

"He's — he's — I say, Sis, old — Mr.— Flannigan's plum *BULLY!*" Jinks swelled with the bigness of the feeling he was trying to express, then sank into the deepest depression at the utter failure of his vocabulary to convey his meaning. He stuck his hands in his ragged pockets and shook his head disappointedly. "He just is! You bet!" he repeated.

Sis eyed him keenly for a moment. "Where'd you get him?" she demanded.

"I didn't," replied Jinks. "It was him as done it. Got me'n' the dog, I mean."

"Where at?" probed Sis. "You better tell it quick, or I'll slap it right out of you!" Her eyes began to flash.

"By my pants,— behind," explained Jinks. "I had the dog, so he got us both. He took us into his store, and let us stay and gave us a lot to eat."

Sis propped her elbows on her knees and, with her chin in her hands, looked hard at Jinks. "Honest, Jinks?" she asked wistfully, a great longing in her eyes and voice. "Did he give you something to eat? A whole lot?"

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“He did,” nodded Jinks. “He just surely did, Sis! He filled us both plum up to busting with ham and toast.”

Sis eyed him thoughtfully a moment, then she sighed. “It must a-took a awful pile!” she said.

Jinks’ face grew gloomy. “It did,” said he. “It did, Sis. And I get all emptied out and ready to fill up again so quick I’m scared blue his eating-things’ll give out before my hungry-holler gets grewed up.”

CHAPTER SEVEN

Peter Flannigan's advent into Mrs. Banny's bare little room was not unlike a sudden puff of wind sweeping across a paper-strewn floor, or an unexpected feline caller at the mouse's ball. As the door opened in answer to his thunderous knock, he was greeted by a silent circle of small, woe-begone faces, all staring at him in wide-eyed amazement. Then when he entered, and the uneven floor creaked and quivered beneath his heavy tread, instantly there came the pattering of many ragged shoes and the fluttering of many tattered skirts, incident to a general exodus of little Bannys through an open door on one side of the tiny stove.

With a broom in one hand and a dust cloth in the other, Mrs. Banny fluttered out from a dim corner, to duck a funny little bow of greeting when she saw who the intruder was. Then carefully wiping off a rickety chair with the cloth in her hand, she offered it to Peter in silence, her astonishment at his unexpected presence having for

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the moment deprived her of her usual fluent speech.

Peter lowered himself cautiously into the proffered seat, and, after depositing his hat on the floor, he spread a hand like a five-pronged pin-cushion out on each knee and stared at the little woman, who had retreated behind the stove as might some ancient and dingy bird seeking shelter after having hopped for a moment from its roost.

"Sure now, Mistress Banny, and 'tis a bit of business that I have come to see ye about this morning," boomed Peter, his big voice filling the tiny room and spreading out into the next, where the little Bannys were all gathered in an agitated group as close to the half-open door as they could get without rolling bodily in upon the visitor.

Mrs. Banny wiped her nose on the dust cloth and snuffled. "If it ain't done as you'd care for it to be did, Mr. Flannigan, I'll be real pleased to begin all over again and do it as you'd like it," she said.

"Eh?" said Peter blankly.

"Yes, Sir," intoned Mrs. Banny, coming out from behind the stove a little way. "Just you say how you'll have it did, and I'll clean you all

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over again from top to bottom, winders and floors, walls and ceiling, whenever you are pleased to have me come."

"Ah," said Peter, as he caught the drift of Mrs. Banny's remarks. "Sure now, and the room is as right as you please! Ye keep it as clean as wax all the time and I've never yet had cause for complaint. I have come to see ye about something else,—to consult ye on a real important bit of business. I'll just begin by asking ye, Mistress Banny, do ye be after having a family?" Peter's big voice lowered impressively, and he leaned forward in the creaking chair at a dangerous angle.

His conversation with Sis on the stairs had given him certain clear impressions regarding the Banny family, but Peter had arranged the opening of the interview before he left the store and he had no intention of wasting what he considered a fine beginning.

Mrs. Banny looked up from the plait she was folding in her black calico skirt, with the pathetic weariness in her eyes sometimes seen in those of an over-worked animal. With the little caretaker tiredness was as chronic as her cold, as much a part of her as her snuffle, so before replying she sat

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down upon an up-turned cracker box. "Yes, Sir, Mr. Flannigan,—thirteen there was in all, counting the four we've laid away, and the last two sets of 'em as came in pairs."

"Oh," said Peter, "I see." He didn't see at all, but as Mrs. Banny's remarks always left her hearers suspended in the air, with their mental heels kicking, Peter thought he would see in a minute. While he waited for illumination, his big fingers drumming on his knees, it dawned upon him that for the first time he regarded Mrs. Banny as an individual. Before she had merely been an object dimly outlined in his consciousness, but this morning Peter had astonished himself several times by striking the personal plane. While Mrs. Banny searched for the conversational thread she had let fall, he realized that he had never really seen her until that moment. She had cared for his room for several years, but never before had he been conscious of how meager she was, how much like a spoon was the general outline of her figure, the front of her being contracted and hollow, the shoulders rounded and stooped. Her scanty gray hair was drawn so tightly back from her thin face it pulled the skin up in little

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points that made Peter's eyes water sympathetically when he noticed them. A chronic cold in the head lent an unbecoming pink to her long, dejected nose that drooped at the end as though peering over the constantly-moving pucker into which her toothless mouth was drawn in anxious search for the meek, little chin that had receded almost entirely from view.

"Yes, Sir," resumed Mrs. Banny, interrupting Peter's study of her dim features. She had been perched nervously on the edge of the cracker box, but as she spoke she edged far back and settled herself comfortably, with a tired sigh. "It was just as I told you, Mr. Flannigan, but Mr. Banny didn't take real kind to the sets. He said it wasn't exactly fair in the Almighty to be a doubling up on poor folks like that, especially when they had already suffered an infliction of children like we had."

"Ah, I see," nodded Peter. "And your family now, Mistress Banny? Does it run to boys or to girls, may I ask?" Peter glanced towards the door, outside of which he had left Jinks sitting on the step, and his wide chest expanded. "Meself, now, 'tis boys I be after having a liking for."

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"Ours is mixed," said Mrs. Banny, again wiping her nose on the dust cloth. "But Mr. Banny was like you, Mr. Flannigan, he always took to boys. 'Boys,' said he, 'you've got, but girls you ain't so sure of.' For my part, though, my taste has always run to girls, for I look on them as a kind of prospect."

"Ah," Peter's mind backed off cautiously, its ear cocked for the word that would give a clew as to just where Mrs. Banny was heading conversationally.

"Yes, Sir, I've always considered girls as a prospect. They may marry, you see, Mr. Flannigan. Though as Mr. Banny said,— 'Sally, they mayn't, so it's a prospect that works back'ards as well as for'ards.' "

"And Mr. Banny now,— er — I — hope he is — doing well, Mistress Banny? "

"I thank you, Mr. Flannigan, and I'm sure I do hope he is, though as things are, we just never can tell about it for certain."

"To be sure," agreed Peter.

"That's it," said Mrs. Banny. "You see, he was took off real sudden last year from setting on top of a heister his gift was a-working out in."

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"A-a-a er — hoister?" asked Peter.

"Yes, Sir, a heister. Mr. Banny was a heister by trade on account of his gift. His mind had always turned to heisters from the time he run an elevator when he was young until five year ago when he took to making 'em himself. He was real gifted, Mr. Banny was, and the first heister he thought out was for sending windows up. It worked just beautiful, for it run each window we had to the top so hard every pane of glass was smashed and I had to buy new ones. But, as Mr. Banny said to me,—'Sally, it was made to heist and heist it did.' The next thing his gift broke out in was a chair bottom that heisted. The first one to set in the chair it was hitched to was Mr. Clifford from Park Avenue church. He felt he had what he said was a 'call' to come among us here in Paradise Alley every week and pray. He never came to our rooms no more after the time he set in that chair, which Mr. Banny said stood to reason he wouldn't, since he was heisted straight over the back, and as he weighed more'n two hundred the shook-up he got was a most considerable one. I was real glad about it, though, if it kept him away, for Mr. Clifford sure was depressing

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to my feelings. According to him it was church regular, or hell certain for us, and as the one meant clothes which we didn't have to speak of, it just plainly left us for the other place where they ain't, so to speak, needed special. I don't have no time to hunt regular pray places, Mr. Flannigan. I just have to kinder live with my prayers as I go, for most generally I'm that tired I can't say 'em proper, no matter where I'm at. Anyway the Almighty is a-looking out for the do a sight more than He is for the kneel, and I guess them as have a broom pushing 'em along rises as fast as them that goes up to the creaking of knee joints."

"Sure now, Mistress Banny, and I agree with ye right there. 'Tis meself that believes in the doing of things as we go along, a sight more than I do in the saying of 'em."

Mrs. Banny snuffled. "So do I, Mr. Flannigan, but Mr. Clifford's religion wasn't that kind. His was the sort that settles in the nose special. It made him cry real hard every time he talked about it to us here in the Alley. It sure did look pious, I'll say that much for it, but the feel of it wasn't, for he always acted like his soul was a lifting up its ruffled petticoats to keep 'em out of Par-

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adise Alley mud." Mrs. Banny's facial twist was that of one holding her spiritual nose and backing off from an unsavory odor.

Peter Flannigan nodded his big, gray head, a new thoughtfulness in his keen eyes,—a new expression softening his rugged face. "And sure now, Mistress Banny, there do be a lot of mud here in Paradise Alley, and I'm a thinking that most of it is the kind that has a powerful ability to stick."

Mrs. Banny's meek little face was raised quickly,—there came a sudden flash of understanding in her faded eyes. "You are right about that, Mr. Flannigan. And it ain't no sign that it ain't there because we ain't always a-seeing of it clear, either."

Again Peter nodded. He grasped Mrs. Banny's meaning, though, as usual, she had backed her way straight through what she had to say. "And I have come to see ye this very morning, Mistress Banny, to ask ye to lend me a bit of aid in removing some of this same Paradise Alley mud from the outside of a boy I've found. Jinks is his name,—as pesky a little imp as ever stepped, but sure, now, I do be after believing that all the

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boy needs to keep clean, both inside and out, is a bit of a chance."

Mrs. Banny's dim face lighted. A motherly gleam came into her eyes, blotting out for the moment their pathetic tiredness. "All many of 'em needs, Mr. Flannigan, is just the chance, though I'll say this,—that that is just the one thing the children in Paradise Alley seldom gets. Jinks has lived all his life nowhere in particular, growing up without no special place that could give him what you might call a pull. Mr. Banny used to say,—'Give 'em a special place to stay in, Sally, for that makes 'em feel a real hard back'ard and up'ard pull, and as long as they feel them two pulls they ain't going at no spanking pace to the devil.' And that's why I've tried to keep ours all together, excepting the four we laid away, and even they rest side by each."

"It must keep ye busy, Mistress Banny, caring for such a lot," said Peter, genuine interest in both face and voice. He was getting a glimpse into a side of life he had never even glanced at before and its power as a thought producer was beyond anything that Peter had ever experienced. Heretofore his outlook on life had been conditioned by

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self alone. This morning, though, it had suddenly expanded, and was taking on dimensions that left the big storekeeper mentally pop-eyed and open-mouthed.

"It do keep me busy, Mr. Flannigan, and try as I do the pull place is all I can manage, with half enough clothes to pass around and,—well—not anything come holidays like Christmas." Mrs. Banny turned the sigh that struggled up from within her narrow chest into a snuffle, and wiped her nose. A chorus of breaths, deep and heavy with sorrow, were at once discharged through the half-open door that led into the room where the little Bannys were congregated.

These dismal gusts penetrated Peter's ear with a force that produced a pain almost physical. He moved uneasily in the creaky chair. The utter bareness of the neat little room, the scantiness of Mrs. Banny's attire, Sis's tragic story of the empty bags, all unexpectedly burrowed together into Peter in a manner that caused a queer feeling of personal guilt to grip him tight somewhere deep down in his interior.

Suddenly his eyes brightened. "Ah,—there do be places here in the city, Mistress Banny, where

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large, well-filled Christmas baskets are given out to all who,—” Peter paused, checked by something in Mrs. Banny’s face.

Her invisible chin suddenly emerged from obscurity and became almost prominent. From her dim eyes there came more than the suggestion of a flash. “I take it real kind the way you mean, Mr. Flannigan,” said she, speaking with a certain dignity that was in no wise diminished by her crouched-up position on the cracker box. “But we have our pride, even if we ain’t, so to speak, got nothing else to cover us with. Some folks can go to them places,—but me and mine can’t. I’m a-trying real hard to raise ’em up human critters, Mr. Flannigan, instead of beggars, even if I have suffered such an infliction of ’em.”

“I see, Mistress Banny, I see,” floundered Peter, his mind backing off with the feeling that it had forced an entrance into a sacred place. “Sure, now, and I was but thinking that may be —” he paused helplessly, too honest to cover his retreat with an empty platitude, and too embarrassed to go on.

“Yes, Sir, I see that you do see real plain, though there’s many as don’t, Mr. Flannigan,”

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intoned Mrs. Banny, wiping her nose. "And then if I do have to work hard, it makes a difference when it's for your own."

"I understand, Mistress Banny, I understand that well, Ma'am," boomed Peter, swelling proudly as he glanced again toward the door. "It does make a power of difference to us when 'tis for our own! I'll certainly say that, ma'am!"

"Yes, Sir, and, as I said, I try to keep the children together the best I can, so's they can feel the pull give 'em by a place to stay in regular, even if it do be but a poor one. I work hard and constant to keep 'em the place, for the pull was all their dear pa had to leave 'em, him being took off unexpected, and not looking to go any time soon."

"Sure now and 'tis glad I am to see ye able to bear up so bravely under such a loss," said Peter. "I trust, ma'am, that his — er — Mr. Banny's end — was what ye might call — er — peaceful?"

"Yes, Sir, though some noisy, as should be expected, seeing he died of a heist that went off too soon, and knocked a hole in the wall. Mr. Banny was blowed right straight through the hole, which

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stood to reason he would be, Mr. Flannigan, seeing he made it himself when he hit."

"What a-a-a-a pity!" gasped Peter, speaking with difficulty.

"Well, now, I don't know about that," said Mrs. Banny, a new and totally unexpected animation in her face and manner. "It was like the girls being a prospect that worked both ways,—back'ards and for'ards. It do seem a pity Mr. Banny never knowed what hit him, for he sure would have been tickled about how lovely his heister worked, and it only half done, too! If it had been finished it likely would have blowed him right straight through the roof as easy as not, there's just no telling! But then it's a comfort to know that when he started for the other world he had a good heist behind him to keep him a-going. He never took kind to heaven somehow,—said it was real depressing to him to think about it, for seeing he never had had no chance in this world to even learn plain reading and writing, how could he have time for such fancy steps as harping? And suppose one was passed to him as soon as he lit, and him a stranger, too? Why, he'd be just disgraced so he never could hold up his head again before

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all the saints, for he didn't know one string from another!

"I always saw he was set hard in his mind against going there, so I've been real pleased he got started off with a good heist. I hope constant he hit Heaven's gate before he knew just where he was heading, for if he'd found out in time he'd surely a-turned. I know he would, for besides the harping he just couldn't abide being worked over into a angel. He said not being born a bird of the air he couldn't see it clear to feeling right dressed in feathers."

"Angels,—er — don't they be only after wearing wings?" ventured Peter, whose ideas regarding celestial fashions were decidedly hazy.

Mrs. Banny brightened perceptibly. "Now, ain't that just what I used to tell Mr. Banny! I used to tell him constant not to be a-worrying about such things as wings and feathers, that there'd be time enough for that when he got there, and that maybe anyway there wouldn't be nothing but the wings! But it wasn't no good,—Mr. Banny was a mighty proper feeling and acting man, and he just swore he wasn't going traipsing about the Golden Street in his skin without a stitch on but

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wings, and them hitched behind where he couldn't even get the comfort of seeing 'em! I always tried to scatter my worries, shed 'em like, same's a hen do her feathers, but poor Mr. Banny, he just would roll his up in a thorn ball to set on."

Peter's broad shoulders shook so convulsively that the small chair he was sitting in creaked and groaned in protest. He drew forth a brilliant silk bandanna and blew his nose like a trumpet. Mrs. Banny at once began polishing hers with the dust cloth.

"Ah,—and the boy now, Mistress Banny,—the boy Jinks, ma'am. Will ye be after scrubbing him down a bit as he needs and a-trimming him up, as a boy should be trimmed?" Peter spoke in subdued tones.

"Yes, sir, and pleased to do him up and down both, I'll surely be," said Mrs. Banny, her faded face lighting up with interest as she moved forward to perch upon the edge of her box. "And when would you like for him to be done, Mr. Flannigan?"

"Right away, Ma'am. He's waiting just without the door, yonder on the steps, talking to that little demon in petticoats,—Sis."

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Mrs. Banny shook her head, mild protest in her dim eyes. "You've only seen a part of her as yet, Mr. Flannigan, for Sis is both in'ard and out'ard, and she works all her different ways real hard. She surely is a terror sometimes, though it ain't more than skin deep, so to speak, and will brush off, but the good's heart deep, grew in, you might say, and that's something mighty likely to stick."

Peter frowned. "Sure, then, and 'tis meself that has only run into the outside of her as yet," said he, reaching for his hat.

"The rest's there," insisted Mrs. Banny. "You just ain't, so to speak, scratched Sis deep enough to find out what kind of a body she really is. She's got a power of Paradise Alley mud clinging to her out'ardly, as it stands to reason she would have, but she's like the potato that grewed in the earth. It's white inside once you get off the knots and the knobs and you'll find Sis the same way, for there ain't a mite of the dirt got to her in'ardly."

Peter nodded his head as he arose to his feet, but said nothing. Sis as good in any way was such an entirely new proposition to him that he felt he would require some time to grasp it.

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Mrs. Banny got up off the cracker box, wiping her rosy nose carefully on the dust cloth. She still clutched the broom in her other hand. "I'll do him the best I can, Mr. Flannigan, both scrubbing and trimming," she said, taking one of her conversational back-steps to Jinks.

"And now if ye'll just be telling me what I owe ye for the job, Mistress Banny,—" Peter's big hand paused, its journey to his pocket half complete, checked by something in Mrs. Banny's face as she turned to him, after waving back the bunch of little Banny heads that were suddenly thrust inside the door.

"I can't no way make a charge for scrubbing a child, Mr. Flannigan, without a body to do for him, or give him a pull as well as trim him. Floors now I can easy, but seeing I've had an infliction of 'em, there being thirteen, counting the four laid away and the two sets that came in pairs,—" Mrs. Banny paused and shook her tight, gray head hopelessly, the idea she was laboring after lost entirely in the mist of her own words.

Peter beamed, as he grasped the thought that had suddenly escaped from the little caretaker. Mentally he took off his hat to the faded, dingy

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woman standing by the cracker box. He held out a huge hand. "Sure now, and I thank ye kindly, Mistress Banny," he said heartily. "And just ye scrub and shear him up neat, and then come ye on over to me store with him for the covering that he needs. And whist, now! Sure while ye are there we'll 'just be after trying to make some of Sis's Santa Claus s'poses come true in the kids' paper bags, Ma'am. Good day!"

His face lobster-red with astonishment at the idea that had suddenly flown straight from his heart through his lips, Peter Flannigan bolted out the door, leaving Mrs. Banny in the middle of the room lost in a joy-trance that deprived her of the power to either move or speak.

CHAPTER EIGHT

The advent of a boy and a dog simultaneously into the big store whose rear end opened into Paradise Alley had ceased to be a matter of surprise to Peter's clerks by the time the New Year was a fortnight old. They had grown accustomed to seeing the red and the brown heads bobbing about, and though they sometimes wondered what the "old man" meant to do with the odd pair, they did not voice the question. Those who worked for Peter Flannigan were kept too busy to have much time for idle wonderings about his affairs or any one else's. And no one ever asked Peter about his own concerns.

As for Jinks and the dog, the one thought some and felt a great deal in those days, and the other accepted the good things that came his way with a grateful politeness that kept him shaking hands fully half his time, and smiling the other.

The dog grew fatter and rounder daily, and Jinks for the first time in his life felt the wear-

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ness that had held him in its grasp for ten years slipping away. He was awakening to the fact that people can be alive as well as exist. His small face was losing its worn, aged lines and taking on youthful curves, and he had learned to laugh,—a sure enough child's laugh with a joyous lilt in it. Peter often grinned broadly to himself in those first days that seemed like fairy-land indeed to the gutter child, for his Christmas dream had come true and there was a very wicked dimple beginning to show plainly in Jinks' chin.

Peter Flannigan said never a word to any one about what he meant to do with the boy who had come so unexpectedly into his life. He thought often and he thought long on the subject, but to no one did he divulge either his thoughts or his intentions.

Jinks was warmly clothed, he was well fed, and he was also trusted absolutely. That the dark times had ever existed in which he had stolen from Peter seemed to have slipped entirely from both his mind and that of the big Irishman the night he came, and he went to and fro in the store, admiring this or looking at that freely, and with no more feeling of constraint than had

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the brown dog who trotted constantly at his heels.

It was all very wonderful to Jinks, but the best part of the new life to him came when he was sitting in the big chair by the great stove in the rear of the store. There he would curl up in a ball among the gaily flowered cushions and listen to the jovial roar of the flames while he basked in the splendid heat that seemed to penetrate all through him, and of which he never tired, or had enough.

There was one thing that Jinks and the brown dog liked even better than prowling about the big store or sitting in the arm chair by the stove. That was trotting at Peter Flannigan's heels. Both were perfectly happy if they could get close to the man who had been so wonderful a friend to them. An unbreakable bond had been established between Jinks and Peter the night the child had sought the man in the upper room. Then later on another strong tie had grown up between the two.

No one who had not seen the inside of Peter Flannigan's room could say that they really knew the big storekeeper. Once they had managed to

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penetrate into his happy hunting ground above stairs, the gruff, keen-eyed man became quite another person to them.

Peter's room was big, with a high ceiling and fresh, clean paper on the walls. A rug of rich, warm reds lay on the floor, and the furniture was large and dark and massive, built on very much the same lines that Peter was himself. Peter had many pictures on his walls, all chosen because they had appealed to him. Some were good, none were bad, and all in some silent way made those who looked at them know that they hung in the room of a person who was clean,—not only physically, but mentally and morally as well.

There were big, comfortable chairs in Peter's room and a wide, cushion-strewn couch, and a mighty table. Strange to say the table was piled high with books and magazines; and almost all the books were volumes of poems. He had little education — as text-book knowledge goes,—but Peter loved these things with a great love, even though he could not understand them. So he had them about him.

All the things in the room, both large and small, gave the few people who ever saw them a new

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view of the hard-headed, hard-handed storekeeper. But the thing that was the crowning glory of the apartment, and that spoke loudest of the inner side of Peter Flannigan, was the violin that lay on a stand close by the big window. It was a small, dark instrument, and the name would have made the eyes of any musician gleam. Piled in heaps beside it on the stand were sheets of music, then they overflowed upon the floor, and filled a large rack that hung close by on the wall.

And that little dark violin was the dearest thing in life to Peter Flannigan. He played with some skill, and all through the dreary drudgery of his childhood, the hard toil of his later years, music had been the one bright and tender spot that weariness and heart hunger and aching bones had never managed to beat out of him. He went to hear the best musicians that came to the city, and when all the people about him were asleep, Peter took out his violin. He played when he was weary, and he became rested. He played when he was lonely, and he was no longer alone. He played when he was sad, and his heart lost its heaviness. It was the one great and perfect thing that life had brought to him. It brings at least

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one to all,—and Peter had been wise enough to recognize and claim his.

Peter retired early one night shortly after Jinks came. He had left the boy curled in the big chair by the stove, watching the red glow of the coals with bright, intent eyes. Peter did not fall asleep as speedily as usual. He was thinking—thinking of Jinks. And as he lay thinking of Jinks, up the stairs floated a sound that brought Peter Flannigan skipping out of bed at one bound. He was clad in his red night cap and his flowing yellow-flannel nightie, but Peter did not mind that. He went to the head of the stairs and leaned silently over—listening. Below he could see Jinks, flat on his small back before the stove. His short legs were crossed, his hands clasped behind his flaming head,—and Jinks was singing,—singing with all the heart and all the soul of him! Just a street song, but the notes came pouring from the boy's lips with a sweetness and a purity that made the big man on the top step of the stairs prance with delight.

Silently Peter slipped back into his room and took down his violin. With equal silence he came back and sat down on the step. Then as Jinks'

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voice rose again, high and clear, mingling with it wailed the strains of Peter's violin. The boy glanced up with a start. He saw the grotesque figure perched above him, and he smiled and nodded in quick understanding. The violin sent forth a note of more than human sweetness and power — the boy replied with a tone as pure and true as the song of a bird.

That was the beginning of a very wonderful and a very beautiful thing to Peter and Jinks. Each night they had their little concert, and each night when the man mounted the stairs, leaving the boy curled under the gray blankets in the kindling box, the good-night glance the two exchanged held a deeper meaning,— a more perfect understanding.

“ I just knowed it was you! I said it when we saw you in the wagin the other day down on Proctor Street! ” a familiar voice shrilled in Jinks' ears one frosty morning not long after the New Year's advent. He stood on the step of the rear door watching the horse for Jake, who had gone inside.

Jinks started and looked quickly up and down the Alley, a warm thrill going all through him at the sound of the well-known tones. At first he

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saw no one — then on the other side of the big delivery wagon he spied Tommy Bates.

“We been looking for you everywhere, and guessed you’d run off, or else got put in the jail!” said Tommy, his black head and impudent face peering cautiously around under the sorrel horse’s long Roman nose.

“Hello, Tommy!” cried Jinks, his freckled face one broad and beaming grin. He became suddenly aware that he was very, very glad indeed to see Tommy Bates, that the heart of him had been simply aching for a glimpse of this old friend’s round face and merry eyes.

“Oh, hookey! Will you but come and take a look at him!” cried the grinning Tommy. He came out from behind the sorrel horse, and sent a ringing “Hi, there!” echoing down the Alley. In immediate response Toney and Bud both came running from their shelter in a near-by doorway. The Brotherhood had evidently gathered with the full intent of interviewing their youngest member.

“Oh, but look at the sport, will you!” shrilled Toney. “Did you ever see the like of his new shoes! Whole ones with not a toe sticking out! Not so much as one end even a-showing! Oh, my,

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will you take another look at him! Josh's Jinks with a white collar around his throat!"

"Shut up!" stormed Jinks, his face growing crimson with rage. "If you don't shut up, Toney Little, I'll jump right slap-bang on you and blodgy your nose same's I did John Preston's!"

"Aw-w-w! Listen to him, will you! Old Peter Flannigan's pretty boy! Oh, my eye!" jeered Toney shrilly.

"You let him be, can't you?" snarled Tommy, giving Toney a sharp poke in the ribs with his fist. He sidled around the horse's head towards Jinks, one wicked black eye on the door. "I say, Jinks, how did you do it, eh? — work him, the old boy, you know? What did you do to get on the soft side of him, and make him treat you so white?"

"I never done nothing, cross-my-heart, Tommy, honest I didn't!" retorted Jinks, his face red, his eyes filled with a stormy light. He felt suddenly shamed and humiliated. He had loved Tommy Bates and had admired Toney Little. He had been surprised himself at how glad he was to see the one's black eyes, the other's long, thin face. And now Toney mocked him, and Tommy openly

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hinted that he was a fraud and a sneak! Indignation seethed hot within him.

"Never done nothing!" grinned Toney, peering across the horse's back at the boy on the step, while Tommy retired again to his shelter behind the wagon. "We know you, Jinks,—we know good and well you've done sneaked it somehow over the old boy,—I did think, though, you would have told us and let us in on it too!"

"I ain't a sneak!" Jinks cried, leaping nimbly out into the Alley and whirling around the wagon toward Toney like a small tornado. "I ain't—I ain't—I ain't! Am I, Sis?" Sis at that moment came around the corner that led into the street. Feeling rather than seeing the storm in the atmosphere, she had bared her thin arms for action as she approached.

"I don't know what it is you ain't, but I'll help you prove it, and make 'em say you ain't even if you are, and you are if you ain't!" she offered obligingly. She ran around the wagon as she spoke in time to see Toney retreating towards the end of it, Jinks following him, his fists going in a business-like fashion that seemed to have gotten on the older boy's nerves.

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"I say, Jinks,—you and Sis are sech awful scrappers a fellow just can't even talk to you!" snarled Toney, still backing around the wagon with Jinks and Sis both dogging his heels.

"Aw, come on! Stop your fighting and tell us about the old man," broke in Tommy. He was standing on tip-toe gazing in the wagon with lively curiosity on his dark, impish face. "What's he did for you, Jinks, anyway?"

Jinks' fists at once became hands and dropped into his jacket pockets. His face took on a broad and beaming grin at Tommy's openly expressed interest in Peter Flannigan. "He's a plum good fellow, that's what Mr. Flannigan is, Tommy. He found me out here behind the barrel with the dog and he warmed us by his stove and give us a lot to eat — me and the dog both,—cross-my-heart he did, boys."

"He did," nodded Sis, folding her bare arms in her skirt to keep them warm. "He just everlastingly did, and if either of you say he didn't I'll knock you both skitterwise! So there now, what you got to say?"

"He filled up the little Bannys' paper bags too," piped Jinks, his face growing so bright that

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Toney and Tommy both stood staring at him in open-mouthed wonder. "Cross-my-heart, boys, if he didn't fill 'em all full to busting with Sis's beautifulest s'poses. Every last one of 'em!"

"He did," corroborated Sis again, nodding her shock of black elf-locks. "And Maudine's that uppety about hers on account of her being cross-eyed and seeing 'em all double that I've had to trim her down three times."

Tommy sighed enviously. "I wishes I was you, Jinks,—or the dog, or the Bannys. I'd like to be even Maudine and see things twice, and maybe get enough one time,—cross-my-heart I would." Tommy glanced down at his rags and shivered. Then he looked at the plain, warm suit Jinks wore and sighed.

Jinks shivered, too, when he looked at Tommy, then he also sighed, all the way from the bottom of his heart when Tommy looked at him. The sigh got caught in the middle by something that turned it unexpectedly into an explosive choke. The day was bitter cold, and Tommy Bates was quite as ragged as Jinks had been less than a month before.

"I say, Tommy, are you — are you — so awful

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cold?" Jinks knew, but the words came from his lips of their own volition.

As Jinks spoke, Tommy Bates' face grew sharp and lined. Bitter scorn shot from his black eyes. "Are you cold, Tommy!" he mocked, his voice hard and shrill. "Oh, no, my dear, not a bit! I'm as warm as toast! My toes are frosted and my body's blue, that's all! But I'm suffering from too much heat, thanky."

"I — I didn't mean to make you mad, Tommy, honest Injun, I didn't!" said Jinks, shivering inside his warm coat as he looked at the boys before him. He had been so proud of his new clothes, but now when Toney and Bud and Tommy stared at them with such envy in their eyes, and spoke of them with such bitterness in their voices, he wished from the very bottom of his heart he had on his rags.

"I say, boys,—" Jinks' face suddenly brightened with the advent of a new idea into his mind. "Mr. Flannigan'll let you come in and get warm by his big stove,—Tommy,—Toney, come on! I just know he will!" he cried eagerly. It suddenly seemed to Jinks a thing too terrible to be borne, that any one should be as near frozen as

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he knew Tommy Bates was. It brought back all the agony of cold and hunger he had known so short a time before.

Tommy giggled. Toney sneered. Bud groaned.

"Come on; do, my dears! He'll let you come in! Do but listen to the pretty boy! Oh, my eye! Old Flannigan's little curly darling!" jeered Tommy. His laugh made Jinks' face glow.

"Won't you come, then, boys,—not none of you?" he asked.

"Not a bit of it! Catch me!" sniggered Toney. He had been sidling around the wagon. He was now on the far side from Jinks. "You are mighty kind to ask us, Jinks, but I can't come to see you and the old boy to-day. Since you feel so friendly to us, though, I'll just help myself to a few of Flannigan's things. Here's a basket full of meat and bread; there's some fruit, too, and several other bundles — I'll take a lot, if you don't mind!"

"No, no, Toney,—please — not that!" Jinks' voice rang out, filled with such sharp agony and terror that Sis glanced back over her shoulder as she went down the Alley on her way home. She

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did not return, though, as she saw no open hostilities. Granny had been drunk for a week, and Sis had troubles of her own.

"Aw — listen to the chicken heart!" sniffed Tommy, diving into the back of the big wagon with both hands. "Hookey,—here's a lot of bread!"

"Don't do it, Tommy; don't. If it was mine you could have it all — but them things belong to Mr. Flannigan! Don't, Tommy, please — please don't!" At some note in Jinks' half frantic voice Tommy drew back, dropping the bundle he held.

Toney shrieked with laughter and seized a large package in each hand. "Thank you, my boy! I remember how you used to smell out things of Flannigan's just for us! I'm sure we are welcome to these. Ta, ta! We'll meet again before long!"

"Toney, fetch 'em back,—fetch 'em back!" Jinks' voice rang through the Alley in agonized tones. At the same moment the rear door was flung wide and Peter Flannigan stood on the threshold.

Jinks rushed to him, his face as white as chalk, his blue eyes wide and filled with something close

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akin to terror. Without a word he hid his face in Peter's long, white apron. Peter glanced keenly about him. He saw the boys running down the Alley; he also noted the empty basket on the ground—the bundles grasped in Toney's hands.

"I never touched nothing, Mr. Flannigan, cross-my-heart I never: I wouldn't touch nothing—I couldn't touch nothing,—" Jinks choked and dived still deeper into the voluminous folds of Peter's apron. The man put his hand on the boy's shoulder and found that the slight figure was shaking like a leaf with sobs.

Peter's face grew black. He placed a huge arm about the shivering child and drew him into the store. "Come on in to the stove, Jinks," he said. "I saw the little limbs through the window when they grabbed the things, and that's why I came out. Sit down now and stop ye shivering. Sure, boy, and I know ye would not touch a thing that did not belong to ye! Haven't we cleaned out the inside of ye until naught of evil is left there? And,—don't I trust ye, Jinks?"

Jinks raised his head. He said never a word as his wide, blue eyes met the keen, gray ones in a

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long, long look; but in the coming dark hours whose shadow was already stretching its gaunt fingers towards him, that look came back to Peter Flannigan again and again, freighted with a strange, almost solemn, meaning.

CHAPTER NINE

Jinks sat in the back of the big delivery wagon one afternoon, his swinging feet keeping perfect time to the song he was singing. He and Jake, the driver, had become the most devoted friends, and the brown head of the dog and the red one of the boy were usually seen bobbing about close to Jake's mop of shaggy tow as the wagon made its daily rounds through the city.

Only a few days had gone by since the morning the boys had robbed the wagon, but Jinks was not thinking of that now,—in fact, he was not thinking of anything. He was just happy,—all the way through, and clasping the curly brown dog close in his arms he swung his feet and sang his song, his heels going faster and faster as the clear, ringing tones of his voice rose higher and sweeter in the cold air.

Jinks had been sitting in the back of the wagon about ten minutes when he turned his head quickly, the movement caused by the strange feeling that

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comes from an intuitive knowledge that one is being stared at. Sure enough, in a doorway across the Alley stood Tommy Bates, his dirty face all a-beam, his eyes twinkling, his hand beckoning. He and Jinks had visited very amicably on the rear steps each day since the morning the wagon had been robbed, though Tommy had refused stubbornly to enter the store, skurrying away like a frightened animal at the slightest hint of Peter's approach. Now each boy bestowed upon the other a broad grin of good fellowship.

"Hello, Tommy!" Jinks cried, bringing his song to an abrupt close and preparing to leap to the ground.

"Come on over!" invited Tommy in a piercing whisper through the hole where his front teeth once had been, but were no longer. "Just you come a-hiking, for I've got something to show you, and something to tell, too!"

"What is it?" demanded Jinks eagerly, running across to the doorway, the dog in his arms. "Tell it quick, Tommy, or I'll chunk it right ker-slap-bang out of you!"

"Betcher life you'd just better try that on!" bristled Tommy. "Betcher life if you do you'll

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ever-lastingly get your cocoanut cracked good and plenty,—that's what you'll get!"

"But what is it?" insisted Jinks, curiosity for the once rising triumphant over the bellicose instinct that had been abnormally developed in the atmosphere of Paradise Alley. "How you know it, Tommy, and where'd you find out about it?"

"I know it 'cause it's the reading in a paper, and I found out about it 'cause Toney read it to me. Toney's the lucky chap,—he can read reading!" Tommy sighed enviously.

"What's it about?" demanded Jinks, hugging the brown dog close, and hooking a persuasive forefinger in Tommy's tattered jacket front. "And where's it at, Tommy?"

"It's in my pocket, and it's about *you!*" Tommy drew back and eyed Jinks triumphantly, swelling with importance. Then, by a series of facial contortions whose meanings were the sacred and secret property of the brotherhood, he conveyed to his companion that he really did know something,—in fact, was not only filled to the limit of his holding capacity with news, but was also on fire with a great desire to impart his knowledge.



"WHAT IS IT?" DEMANDED JINKS EAGERLY

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"Well, tell it, can't you?" insisted Jinks with an impatient shove that came close to toppling Tommy out the doorway. "Spill it."

Tommy nodded mysteriously. "It's about you,—in the paper—and the *DOG*, mostly though the *DOG*!" He brought the words out slowly that each might have its proper weight. Nor was he disappointed in the effect that his announcement had.

Jinks' eyes grew big, his face white. He backed off from Tommy, clasping the brown dog so tightly in his arms that the little creature gave a sharp yelp of protest, then promptly licked the dimpled chin above his head in token of apology.

"What is it, Tommy?" the boy asked, in a voice that had suddenly lost all its joyous lilt.

"Toney read it to me this very morning," said Tommy. Fishing about in his pocket he brought forth a very small and very dirty scrap of paper. "I can't read it, but I can say it, for Toney read it to me until I know it 'thout any reading of it. 'Lost,—a brown dog named Bat.' See—" triumphantly, as the small, curly ball in Jinks' arms jumped and whimpered and wagged in an ecstasy.

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of delight. "The little cuss! He knows his name!"

Jinks grasped the dog close. "He ain't named that,—what you said! He's named *Dog*,—my Dog!" he faltered, his voice dull and smothered. "Just you tell me what else it says, Tommy." The big, blue eyes that rested upon Tommy's impudent face were wide and strained.

"It says ten dollars reward for bringing him back to Dr. Jasper Brereton," announced Tommy.

"It just can't be — my dog, Tommy! It can't be!" All the joy-light was gone from the small, white face, the spring from the slim figure. Jinks looked tired and old, as though the weight of life that had so recently slipped from his shoulders had suddenly settled down upon him again.

Tommy cocked a bright, black eye at his companion's downcast face. "How come it can't be?" he demanded. "Toney said the paper was printed the day after you found the dog,—and he sure does know his name is Bat. See?"

Jinks saw. The brown dog had quivered delightedly at the sound of the evidently familiar name. Then he held out a silky paw to shake hands, smiling graciously at Tommy.

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“You just plainly ain’t got no right to keep him, Jinks,” said Tommy piously. “He ain’t yours, and if you keep him you’ll be plum stealing, you really will. And you and me both knows that ain’t good for us,—at least *I* do.” Tommy shook his black head with a self-righteous air as he delivered himself of this unexpected moral lecture.

Jinks stared in surprise. “I say,—what’s the matter with you, anyway?” he bristled. “Cross-my-heart, if I don’t believe you’ve done gone batty! My dog’s mine ’cause I found him! I don’t know nothing about your old doctor man, nor your old paper with its reading either!”

Tommy grinned and slowly closed one bright, beady eye. “Gee! You sure was a-blowing big and hard then when you told me you’d done cleaned out your inside,—you and old man Flannigan! I thought it was all slush, and so I told Toney and Sis. If you are too clean in your middle to let me’n’ Toney pinch a loaf of bread from Flannigan when we are so hungry we can see our wheels go ’round and hear ’em tick, how come you can swallow a dog whole, and keep him down, too, when you know for sure he ain’t a-belonging there,

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'cause why he belongs to the doctor man on the Bullyvard!" Tommy always gave his opinion in very plain terms, stating it crudely, but with a concrete clearness that drove his meaning home. Now he wagged a dark head impressively at Jinks, and burrowed into him with an inquisitorial eye whose glance was untempered by mercy.

"I — I — I — but Tommy,— I *found* him!" faltered Jinks, clasping the dog so closely in his arms that the little fellow again raised a protesting voice. "I *found* him, Tommy, and me'n' Sis we tied him up and grewed him together! He's just plum *bleeged* to be mine!"

"And see, sonny, I done found out where he belongs for you, so's you can take him home," said Tommy cheerfully, his spirits rising as Jinks' sank. "And all I gotter say is,— do *this* if so be you are *that*! If you ain't,— don't!" Tommy thumped the dirty scrap of paper with a still dirtier finger, and cocked a knowing eye at Jinks. "I ain't a mite of use, Jinks, for the cleaning of your inside that you was a-telling me about unless it works your outside,— see? It's gotter work your legs and wag your tongue this time, sure-pop, or it ain't nothing but slush to come it over old

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man Flannigan,—that's what it is." Faith without works evidently had no attraction for Tommy Bates. Tommy also meant to see that his brother's faith should prove itself by material manifestations, if wordy prods in his spiritual ribs possessed any persuasive power.

"I gotter go right straight home, Tommy." All the life had died out of Jinks' voice, all the light from his face.

Tommy grinned impishly. "All right," said he. "I know where this doctor man what Bat belongs to lives. Me'n' Toney went out there and looked at the house this very morning, so's I'd know it to show to you! It's a buster — on the Bullyvard! My eye!"

"You shut up, Tommy Bates, or I'll blodgy your nose for you!" cried Jinks. Then, without looking around to see how Tommy took his obliging offer, he pulled his cap over his eyes and darting across the street plunged head foremost into the rear door of the store.

The morning following Tommy's interview with Jinks, a motley procession emerged from the entrance of Paradise Alley and headed towards the

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more aristocratic part of the city. It was led by Tommy, who stepped high, his cap jauntily perched over one ear, his dirty face one broad smile. Tommy simply exuded self-complacency, and walked along surrounded by an aura of it that was almost visible. This state of beautitude was in part due to his gratification at the result of his determination that Jinks should walk in the path of strict rectitude; his satisfaction, though, was decidedly augmented by the fact that he wore Jinks' new jacket!

Close behind Tommy came Sis, an unusual soberness on the small, dark face under the heavy, black hair, her big eyes filled with a queer mingling of respect and sympathy when they rested upon Jinks, who trudged along at her side. The brown dog was close clasped in Jinks' arms. The freckled face above the silky head was white and worn, but settled into lines of grim determination that said silently the will-power that the square chin indicated had stepped to the fore and was forcing the reluctant feet to walk in the path that led to the Boulevard and renunciation.

Jinks had wound up his long, silent fight of the afternoon in the kindling box the night before with

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Peter for audience and Bat for confessor, comforter and sympathizer.

Each evening after Peter retired to his upper chamber Jinks and the dog had a grand, good-night frolic before the big stove, the two rolling over and over on the floor in an abandon of joyous delight. Their sounds of mirth penetrated to Peter's room, and he had formed the habit of slipping out to the top of the stairs to peer down upon the unconscious pair below.

These surreptitious peep-shows had become such a source of delight to Peter that on the evening following the afternoon on which Tommy had told Jinks of the advertisement for the dog, the big store-keeper took his accustomed perch on the top step, simply purring in pleased anticipation. All the evening he had been too busy with his accounts to notice Jinks, beyond the fact that he and the dog had been curled for hours in the big arm-chair. Peter had gone to his room as soon as the huge ledger was closed, and so failed to note how quiet the boy was, and was totally unprepared for the deadly silence that reigned in the store.

Peter peered eagerly through the banisters,—looking in his flaming red night-cap not unlike a

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Friar Tuck masquerading as a jovial Mephistophiles. As he looked down his face grew blank, and his eyes opened wide. No boy and dog were rolling and whirling about on the rug before the stove, as was their nightly custom! Peter craned his neck through the banisters, and by the light that came from the open stove door he saw a small, huddled figure sitting in the middle of the kindling box, its knees drawn up under its chin, its head bowed.

"Bless gracious!" muttered Peter. "Has the little cuss got it again in his middle?"

"It's my inside, Dog—" Jinks spoke in subdued tones, but so clear was his voice and possessed of such unusual carrying qualities that each low word fell distinctly upon Peter's ear. And as it fell Peter scratched the end of his nose with a big forefinger, and sat with drooping head a second, thinking deeply. Then very deliberately he tucked the generous tail of his yellow-flannel nightie snugly about his feet, and, thrusting his night-capped head again through the banisters, he listened shamelessly to the caucus being held in the kindling box!

"Cross-my-heart, Dog, if I don't just everlast-

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ingly wish Tommy and Toney was both of 'em dead and gone to Glory-be!" came in a stifled wail from amid the folds of the gray blanket. Peter jumped,—so did the brown dog that was sitting in the end of the box, his soft eyes fastened on Jinks. With that strange psychic understanding possessed by the canine race, Bat felt that something was wrong, and scrambling over to Jinks he stood upon his hind legs and placed both forepaws about the boy's neck.

Peter moved nervously for a second, as though he wanted to go and join the dog, but thought better of it and remained where he was.

"Tommy was a bum fellow telling me about that doctor man saying you was his dog in the paper, and making me just everlastingly have to take you to him! You know I gotter do it,—BAT!" The word he had been forcing back all the afternoon came out with a bang, and as the dog scrambled about deliriously in the kindling box, frantic with delight at his restored identity, Peter nodded his head in the darkness.

He was beginning to understand.

"Cross-my-heart again, Dog, I never, never would let you go if it was just me,—no matter

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how you made my inside ache 'cause I'd done stole you! I'd have let it ache and ache and kept you for mine, sure pop, if it wasn't for the others! But I gotter let you go — I gotter take you to that man — I gotter do it! I gotter give you away, not for me — but for Mr. Flannigan. He trusts me, Dog; he said I was a going to keep my inside clean, and I can't do it with no dog in it that ain't mine, if you *are* all I've got or ever did have! You know I can't!"

In the kindling box Bat scrubbed a cold nose all over Jinks' face in a frantic effort to rub in the sympathetic understanding he had no power to put into words.

On the stairs Peter dropped his big head on his hands, and sank back deeper in the shielding shadows.

"It ain't all Mr. Flannigan either," went on Jinks, confessing himself with a soul-satisfying thoroughness. "It's Sis a good deal,—and Toney a little,—and Tommy,—Oh, my eye! It's Tommy a blooming lot! It's just everlastingly Tommy special, next after Mr. Flannigan! Oh, Dog — I gotter take you to your home in the morning where the doctor man's at what you

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belong to, even if you *are* mine! I gotter do it for Mr. Flannigan!"

As the boy ceased abruptly, stifled more by the storm of long suppressed sobs than the shielding folds of the gray blanket into which the red head burrowed, the big man on the top step slowly removed his flannel night-cap. Then after a second's hesitation, he got up hurriedly and went into his room.

Peter Flannigan sat down on the side of his bed, staring hard at the flaming head-dress he held in his hand. "I'll — be — blamed!" Peter choked and then ceased abruptly. "The little — cuss!" He took a fresh start in tones that held a decided wobble. "The darned little cuss! Well, indeed and I think he *has* got it clean! And sure now, 'tis meself that knows he'll keep it so,—giving up the dog settles that, for an inside-clean-up-do-right most generally has to have a pain hitched to it somewhere, and when it has, sure it's one of them things that stays,—it's got a sticking power that beats even Paradise Alley mud!"

Peter nodded his gray head wisely at his red flannel night-cap, then clapped it on, and, hurriedly turning off the light, he scrambled into bed.

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As the small procession from Paradise Alley turned into the wide Boulevard, Tommy gave a war-whoop in which was mingled a delighted greeting and a discharge of pent-up emotions. Tommy had grinned and joked with his might since leaving the Alley, but even his spirits were flagging beneath the constantly deepening gloom of Jinks and Sis. The nearer they came to Dr. Brereton's home, the harder Tommy found it to walk with his jaunty swagger. Therefore it was that his greeting to little Billy King was of such an unusual fervor that it made the smaller boy's heart beat a lively tattoo of delight.

"Where you going to, and what you going to do with the dog?" twittered Billy, turning his pony to the sidewalk in response to Tommy's call.

"We are taking him out to the doctor man what he belongs to, though he ain't his dog, but Jinks'." Sis spoke in subdued tones, feeling rather than seeing that Jinks was incapable of offering any explanation.

Billy blinked at Jinks through his pop-eyed glasses, and something in the small, determined face of the boy he adored brought the King heir

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slipping from his pony and across the pavement to lay his gloved fingers on Bat's soft, brown head. "He's a mighty nice dog, Jinks," said Billy in his neat, little voice.

"And you just everlastingly bucked up about him that time, Billy!" said Sis, plunging gallantly into the conversation to cover Jinks' speechlessness. "You were a brick, sure pop!"

Beneath the genuine approval in her eyes and voice Billy's pale face flushed, his meager chest expanded. "You can ride my pony, Sis, if you want to!" he offered, holding the reins out to her.

Into Sis's dark cheeks a crimson flush arose that made her small countenance vivid for a fleeting second. She started towards the pony, her eyes radiant with delight,—then hesitated, looked at Jinks, and stood still. "I—I—I think maybe Jinks had better ride to-day, Billy," she said. "He's—he's—well, you see, maybe it'll make up some for the dog."

"Can't nothing ever, never make up for my dog!" Jinks forced the words across his lips with an effort that left his face white, his hands cold. "Not any other nothing will ever be him, Sis!

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Not any other nothing can't ever get broke like he did, and be mended, and sleep in the barrel, and eat the ham, and snuggle up under the gray kiver —" Jinks paused with a choke as his mind worked backward into the sorrow-times that had been shared by the little ball of silk in his arms. Billy King patted Bat's head again; and blinking her big eyes faster than usual, Sis came from the edge of the pavement to grasp Jinks' sleeve with a comforting tightness that the boy felt and understood.

"I'll ride the pony for you, Billy!" offered Tommy, upon whose nerves the gloom-charged atmosphere was settling more heavily each moment. "I'll ride him all the way up the Bullyvard to Doctor Brereton's if you want me to!"

Sis whirled around like a flash. "I'd just like to see you try it!" said she, her eyes blazing. "You get on that there pony one time, Tommy Bates, and I'll knock you right slap-bang off it! And when you light, cross-my-heart, if I don't claw your jaw and chunk you in the stummick's hard as ever I can!"

"Aw — shut up, you scratchie cat!" said Tommy, backing off as Sis started in his direction

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with a threatening head-shake. "Billy's going our way; he don't want to ride all the time!"

"Let Jinks ride then," retorted Sis.

"I — I don't want to," said Jinks, shrinking in his present grief-stricken state from a delight that would have warmed the heart of him the day before. "I'd rather walk and carry my — the dog."

"I say —" Sis's eyes began to grow big and wide, with the unseeing look in them that always meant a story-telling attack was coming on. "I say — let's — let's — Billy King, seeing it's the dog's very last hour, let's let *him* ride! He ain't never rode a pony in all his life no more'n we have! Let's let him have his turn now, for it'll never, never come to him again in this world!"

Billy beamed. If the dog rode, that meant he would be allowed to accompany this altogether desirable trio all the way out the Boulevard to Dr. Brereton's home! Surely the gods were good in that they gave to William King his heart's desire! "That's it!" he said, his voice unsteady from the rapture thrilling within him.

"Sure it is!" said Sis, her eyes growing bigger

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and wider as the wonder of the plan began to unroll before her mental vision. "And we can take turns holding him on, and we'll walk out in the middle of the Bullyvard right by the pony, just like a circus percession or a funeral parade!"

"That's bully!" cried Tommy, hailing anything with gladness that would remove from him the terrible feeling of being responsible for the whole thing that settled down upon him with renewed force every time he saw Jinks' tragic face or encountered Sis's disapproving glance. Her look made Tommy feel anxious, for he knew that with Sis disapproval always meant an early hour of strict reckoning. "How you like it, Jinks?"

"If the dog wants to, he can," faltered Jinks, who found words harder and harder propositions the nearer the end of the journey came. As he spoke he went to the pony's side and, lifting the dog, placed him in the tiny saddle. Bat turned his head, distinct disapproval in his soft brown eyes. At the same moment he tucked his plume as close to his left hind leg as he could glue it, and flattened his ears down on either side in a fashion that made his small face the picture of canine mis-

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ery. "He don't like it a bit!" said Jinks, preparing to take him down.

"Just you wait till we get real close to him, side by each, me'n' you both, then he'll like it prime!" comforted Sis, and running around to the other side of the pony she laid a small, dirty hand on the brown dog's curly back. Jinks placed his hand close beside Sis's and with his two friends thus bracing him physically with their hands and mentally with their affection the little chap began to look less like his last hour really had come.

The procession again struck into the middle of the Boulevard and took up its line of march for the home of Dr. Jasper Brereton. Billy and Tommy led the pony, and Jinks and Sis walked close by its sides holding Bat carefully in the saddle.

The brown dog was too well bred to offer any vocal protests, and after the first few anxious moments his face lost its martyr-like expression, his soft ears again stuck up at their usual happy angle, and the plummy tail wiggled a silky tip in grateful response to the loving pats and squeezes administered surreptitiously by Jinks.

When Jinks started up the wide walk that led

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from the high iron gates to the door of Dr. Jasper Brereton's home, the escort deployed, and, lining up along the fence, glued their faces tight to the openings between the bars. The three pairs of eyes followed the slight figure bearing the dog in its arms with as many different expressions, Sis's being soft and luminous with sympathetic understanding, Tommy's keen with curiosity, and little Billy King's wide with admiration.

Jinks stumbled several times as he plodded heavily along his Via Dolorosa. He did not look behind, however, the glances of the six eyes that were boring into his back proving, though sub-consciously, both a mental prop and a physical propeller. The journey from the gate to the house was the longest path that Jinks had ever trod, and the steepest, and possibly it was just as well that the increasing agitation of the dog demanded all his attention, for the nearer the pillared veranda was approached, the more desperate became Bat's efforts to leap from the arms that held him.

As Jinks stumbled blindly up the wide steps,—urged on by the indomitable something inside of him that was working his legs woodenly and holding his face immovably towards the house,—the

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front door swung open. A tall, dark-faced man, dressed for the street, came out, and paused with a start and a smile as his glance fell upon the small figure toiling up the steps with the dog in its arms. "Why, *Bat!*" he exclaimed, his surprised greeting being at once answered by a yelp of delighted recognition that Jinks' suddenly tightening clasp turned into a howl of pain.

"Hello, youngster!" Jasper Brereton came to the steps, and looked down with a smile into the small, tragic face that was raised to his.

"Take him — he's your dog!" came in a queer, smothered gulp from behind the dog, which was making frantic efforts to escape.

"Where did you get him?" the doctor asked, his amused expression changing suddenly to one of startled interest as he caught a glimpse of the blue eyes over Bat's agitated head.

"You take him,—darn quick!" Jinks dropped the quivering ball of delight into the white, scholarly hands extended to receive it, and backed hurriedly down to the second step.

"But, I say, youngster! Where did you find him?" insisted Dr. Brereton, turning his head aside to avoid the caresses of a delirious pink

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tongue, and also coming down to the second step.

“ I never found him,— he found me — butted right slap-bang inter me *with* a tin can hitched to his tail! We tied him up, and he spit out the apple, and et the ham and slept in the gray kiver,—” A sudden fierce gust of rage swept through Jinks, rendering him speechless for a second, during which he battled desperately with the tempest of tears that was about to disgrace him forever in his own eyes by demanding way. “ You take him — and let me alone! ”

“ But, the reward, you know! ” The doctor followed as Jinks backed on down to the walk. “ Wait until I give you — ” He thrust his hand into his pocket as he spoke. But he did not take it out.

Bristling with pain and rage, Jinks seized a handful of gravel and threw it full at the stately gentleman standing on the step. “ You take that! ” he panted, “ and I *dare* you to pay me for my dog. I don't want none of your old money! ” Whirling around he sped like the wind down the walk.

A wail of renunciation had vibrated beneath the tempestuous outbreak. Dr. Brereton's keenly at-

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tuned intuition caught the minor chord to which mere physical hearing would have been deaf. "Poor little beggar!" he said thoughtfully, as he turned back into the house with the dog in his arms. "I wonder where that child came from and how he found Bat and his way here!"

"I say,—where's the money, Jinks?" Tommy demanded as Jinks came out the gate that Sis silently held open for him.

"I ain't got no money," said Jinks dully.

"Didn't he — didn't he give you *nothing*?" Disappointment was keen in Tommy's voice.

"I never wanted no money nor no nothing for — Bat, Tommy Bates!" exploded Jinks, with a growing hostility in his glance.

Spiritual prods are not always popular with the prodded, it matters not what an inner up-lift may grow out of their application. Like blisters, their beneficial results are more appreciated after their removal, both from mind and body.

"Gee! I say, Jinks, what did you give him up for, then?" Tommy fastened an inquisitorial black eye on Jinks.

"Cause,—cause, cross-my-heart-hope-I-may-die, Tommy Bates, I never wanted no dog, nor

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you, either, in my inside! Now you let me alone!" Jinks turned his back square upon Tommy as he spoke.

"I say, Jinks, you can ride my pony home!" twittered Billy King, adoring admiration in his eyes.

"No, he won't!" said Sis, pulling the silk muffler about Billy's throat close up under his transparent little ears. "You just get right on that pony and hike for home your very own self! You are so near froze now that you don't look more than half alive."

Billy shook his tow head, as he moved obediently towards the pony. "I ain't," he said cheerfully as Sis helped him to mount, "I ain't, Sis, in my arms and legs and back and things; but I'm just awfully alive here in my middle. It's mighty curious, though, for the harder it thumps the tireder I get, and the tireder I get the harder it thumps."

Billy was gasping with fatigue as he took the reins that Sis placed in his gloved fingers. He did not mind the weariness that was shaking him from head to feet though, for an inarticulate pean was vibrating in his heart because he felt that at last he had become one of the elect,—had been

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deemed worthy a place in the brotherhood of Paradise Alley, though but for a brief time.

As Billy rode slowly away, Sis turned to Tommy. "You give me Jinks' jacket, Tommy Bates," she ordered, extending her hand. "He said you could wear it out here and I could wear it back. Now, you shuck!"

Tommy backed off, protest written large on his face. "I say, Sis, just lemme wear it to the first corner yonder!"

Sis followed him, fell determination in her big eyes. "Shuck, I tell you!" she cried, and, landing a stinging slap on his cheek with one hand, at the same moment she peeled the jacket neatly off of him with the other. "I'm going to let Jinks wear it the first half of the way home and I'll wear it the last, 'cause he'll have a fire to warm by when he gets there, and I won't," she said, passing a small, cold hand over the soft, thick garment she held. "Me'n' him are going home by the short cut through the alleys, but you ain't going with us, Tommy Bates, not a step! You just everlastingly git, and you keep right straight on gitting until you've done plum got out of my sight!"

CHAPTER TEN

“ I have heard that the old chap keeps his cash right in the house all the time, and that he don't ever go to the bank more'n once a week, and frequent not that often. He thinks that nobody knows about the piles of money he rakes in each day, and the loads of it he has around him constant, so he keeps the box there sometimes until it's so full it's about to bust. Jim here, he used to be old man Flannigan's porter, and he knows.”

Three men and a boy were sitting in a low, dark room, the atmosphere of which was heavy with an earthy, mouldy odor that spoke aloud of sunlight and fresh air shut out and dampness and gloom shut in. The room was one of the three forming the cellar of the dingiest, dirtiest, most lop-sided tenement that faced on Paradise Alley. It was dimly lighted by a long, narrow, slit-like window near the top, the sill level with the alley that ran along the side of the building.

The first speaker was a low, heavily built man,

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with a bullet head set squarely upon a thick, bull-neck. His face was dark and lowering, a deep red scar that extended across the corner of one eye up into his close-cut black hair adding to the natural brutality of his expression.

The other man was evidently one who drank heavily and often. His face was large and soft looking, his general appearance being not at all unlike that of a big, white chestnut worm. His eyes were weak and inflamed, and his porous nose highly tinted with a queer combination of red and purple mottlings.

Jim, who had been referred to as Peter Flannigan's one-time porter, was black, with crafty eyes and a giant's form.

The boy was Toney Little!

"I was rat dar wid Mr. Flannigan for er mont' las' fall, an' I have seed him tote dat dar cash box up ter his room when hit war so hefty he couldn't hardly hist hit from de floor! An' sho's I'm bawn, every thing in dat dar box was money,—jest silver or gold or greenbacks! Dat what hit was, kase onct I seed in hit when hit was open,—an' de sight I seed am a staying wid me yet! Silver an' gold an' greenbacks, yes sah! Money,

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—um-m-m-m!” The negro’s voice was low and slushy.

The eyes of the three men and the boy all glared with the hideous light of greed at mention of such vast stores of wealth.

“I’ve been in Flannigan’s store several times just to take a look around,” said Dink Todd, the man with the scar. “And it strikes me that it’s just about the tightest crib ever I tried to crack! The cash is there all right,—I’ve hung around enough to find out that a pile of it is paid across his counters each day,—but so far as I can see to get our fingers on it we’ll have to blow the whole end of the building out, and then more’n likely send the old boy to Kingdom Come, and end by getting our own necks stretched! Not any of that in mine, thank you!”

“It’s bolted and barred fit to be a jail,” struck in Burr Dillard, the other man. “I went there not long ago to buy a few things,—but to look mostly,—and I looked good and keen, let me tell you, for I have had my eyes on that cash box of Peter Flannigan’s for nigh to a year.”

“Thar ain’t arry chanct fer us to git in by de front do’,” said the porter. “I knows dat good

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and well. But we mought make hit effen we could git somebody dat's little and slippery ter go over de do' in de back whar dar ain't no light. Hit's locked wid er chain; but over hit dar ain't per-sackly what you'd call er transom, but hit's got er little narrer place clost ter de top ter let in de air. Hit's to narrer fer er man to squoze froo, or even him, slim built as he is," nodding towards Toney Little, "but er rale little chap mought make hit. Onct in, he could ondo de do' and let in de rest, and dar we is, widout nuffin to do but settle de ole man and make off wid de cash."

Toney's light, ferret-eyes gleamed. "I believe I've got it!" he cried, moving over close to the two men. "I know a little chap that will just exactly fill the bill."

"Who is it?" demanded Dink Todd sourly. "It seems to me we've got two too many in this thing now." He frowned gloomily at Jim and Toney.

"Then you git out! Me and Toney here was the first to think the plan up!" snarled Burr Dillard, who, for a wonder, was perfectly sober. "We took you in, Dink Todd, because you was real handy with the saw and jimmy, and was

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down on your luck, and it was you that brought the nigger along!"

"Well, there ain't any use in getting up a row about it now. We are all in it, or we are all out of it. Let's know who it is Toney's got on a string." The man with the scar spoke harshly, and the other at once quieted down. Dink Todd's stronger personality made him easily the leader of the weaker characters.

"It's a little chap named Jinks," said Toney. "He used to be one of us, but now,—Gee, he surely do go in style! Old Flannigan's plum batty about him. Took him in right out of the alley one night and treats him like he was his own. Dresses him in good, whole clothes and lets him sleep in the store by the dandiest stove you ever did see! It's a buster! I know I can get hold of Jinks, and we can make him go through that hole over the top of the door. He's little and skinny, and, of course, seeing he lives there, he'll know all about them bolts and chains that hold the door shet. Once he gets in,—why, there we are, too. See?"

"But—will the kid do it?" asked the man with the scar.

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Toney grinned, an evil light coming into his eyes. "He's been in our gang since he was so high," measuring about a foot from the floor with his hand. "He ain't no saint, if he does try to come the soft slush over old Flannigan. If he ain't happy about the idea,—I guess you can tan his hide for him a few times, and help him to change his mind."

"You surely ain't got a weasel eye for nothing, Bud," said the gentleman addressed. He looked with genuine admiration at Toney as he spoke. "I tell you what—some day you'll make your fortune as a cracksman if you don't happen to get that stringy neck of yours stretched before you are many years older."

Toney Little grinned and wriggled, well pleased at what he regarded as the greatest compliment he had ever received.

"Dat's er fine idee," chimed in Jim, showing all his white teeth in a broad grin. "When I was dar I diskivered dat Mr. Flannigan keeps de cash box rat under de head of his own bed at night. He don't have no watchman, but he sho' am got er bustin' big gun what he lays on de table by de bed, so's it will be dar handy. It may be

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dat he's done changed de hiding place of de cash sence den. But effen he am de little chap can tell us."

The other three nodded and exchanged pleased glances. Jinks' value was going up rapidly.

"I think we can make this haul as easy as falling off a log if the little chap Toney's talking about is slim enough to be stuck through that opening." Dink Todd had suddenly lost his sour looks and was leaning forward, his face flushed, — his eyes alight. "And as I'm dead broke and Burr ain't got but one dollar in the world, I think we'd better get this thing fixed up right away. The sooner it's done the better, say I."

"The sooner the better," echoed Burr Dillard.

"Rat erway's de best time fer me," said Jim.

"That there Jinks is getting so fat he'll soon be too big to go through the hole over the door," grinned Toney. "I better bag him right away."

Four heads were at once clustered close together; four minds were soon working busily, planning, and when the quartet parted, each to go his separate way, the robbery was all arranged.

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"I hope you ain't a-holding it up agin me, Jinks, the way I did the other day about them things to eat in Flannigan's wagon, you recollect." Toney Little came up beside Jinks the morning after the meeting in Burr Dillard's cellar. The smaller boy was sitting on the back step of the store, as was his daily custom, waiting for Jake to start off on his rounds. His elbows were on his knees, his chin in his palms, and he was looking hard at the ground.

Only the day before had Jinks taken Bat to his home, and the boy's heart felt like a lump of lead in his breast. This was the first trip he had ever made in the delivery wagon unaccompanied by the dog, whose coming into his bleak life had first lighted the spark far inside that was widening daily into something bigger and deeper and higher than the child, as yet, possessed any conscious means of realizing.

"I'd sure hate awful, Jinks, to think that you was mad at me." Toney grinned insinuatingly, at the same time backing around close against the wall so that he could not be seen from the rear window.

Jinks looked up with a start that was promptly.

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followed by a smile of welcome. "I ain't, though I was awful sorry you done it, Toney," he said. Then suddenly becoming painfully conscious of his own warm, comfortable clothing and Toney's miserable rags, Jinks added hurriedly, "Betcher life it must 'a' looked good! But I hope you and Tommy won't take nothing else from Mr. Flannigan. He trusts folks, Toney. He thinks they are white!"

Jinks' dark-lashed eyes were bluer than Toney had ever seen them, and in his clear voice there vibrated a note of haunting sadness that had crept into it since the day before.

Toney Little hung his head. He looked as unhappy as he could. It was rather difficult, though, for he was almost bursting with unholy laughter at the way his carefully formed plan was working out.

"I'll tell you something, Jinks, what I wouldn't near tell to any of the other boys. I was pretty nigh starved to death that day, cross-my-heart, if I ain't a-telling you the gospel truth! I was just most froze as stiff as a bone, too. Of course you don't know nothing about such things now, but you ain't forgot, have you, how it feels to be so

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cold all your bones aches, and so hungry it just seems like there ain't nothing to you but your middle, and that that ain't got nothing in it?"

Jinks' slim, little body quivered. All the light died out of his large eyes. His small face grew drawn and sharp as memory seized him in its grip and gave him a merciless wring. "I ain't forgot, Toney," he said. "I think freezing and starving is things that folks never can stop remembering about, they hurt so bad. We don't ever, never forget what we've felt right in our own selves,—do we, Toney?" he asked, with a sudden perfect mental conception of experience's thorough teaching, though the power of expression had not yet developed sufficiently for him to put it in adequate words.

Toney nodded. "I just knew you was the kind to remember and to feel for your old friends that ain't had as soft a bed to drop in as you have! I don't care for most folks to know about how cold and hungry I get, but Gee! I don't mind telling you, Jinks,—not nothing! You see, you've always been such a jolly, good feller! You've got a lot of sand, too. Tommy now—why, Tommy Bates ain't got er bit of grit! He

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gits plum daffy when he gits scared, and so does Bud."

"I — I think Tommy's a pretty good sort of chap," said Jinks. "Unless he sets on your inside," he added after a pause.

"You just let me know when he tries to set on you!" blustered Toney. "You tell me about it, Jinks, and I'll smash him inter a jelly! That's what I'll do for him! You are too sandy a little chap for such a feller as Tommy to even try to set on!" Toney's thin face flushed with the generosity of his offer.

"He dassent try to set on my outside," said Jinks. "If he does I'll blodgy his nose."

"Of course you will!" encouraged Toney. "You are the dandiest little cuss in a shindy ever I did see. You can beat Tommy any day. And Bud, too. I just believe maybe you might do Sis up if you was to try real hard, though that Sis,—that Sis,—she just ain't no feller! She's a plum scratching devil, that's what that there Sis is!" The bitterness of many past experiences tintured Toney's voice with vinegar when he mentioned Sis, eliminating entirely its previous oily smoothness.

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"You just better not go to calling Sis no names, Toney Little! If you do I'll jump right slap-bang on to you and blodgy your nose good and plenty!" Jinks' face flushed, and his red head bobbed threateningly at Toney.

"I ain't a-saying nothing mean about Sis," explained Toney, hurrying to cover his error. "I was a-meaning it nice, Jinks, cross-my-heart I was! I jest meant I ain't ever, never in all my days seen such a scrapper as that Sis is. She sure can everlastingly put anybody right out of business in no time when she 'lights on 'em."

Jinks grinned appreciatingly. "You see her that time she done up Bud for knocking over a whole lot of them there Banny twins?" he asked, his eyes bright with honest admiration for Sis's pugilistic skill. "She jumped right ker-slap on Bud and clawed his jaw until it was plum skun, and chunked him in the stummick so's he never had no wind left to work his breather with. Sis sure is a terror! I tell you when she gets a-going good she just everlastingly gives you the hops right in your middle."

"She sure is, and she just does! Don't nobody or nothing come up to her," agreed Toney with

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alacrity. "But I tell you what, Jinks, ain't a one of 'em got you bested!"

"Tommy's a pretty good fighter!" said Jinks. He liked Tommy. He swelled with pride, though, at Toney Little's unstinted praise.

Toney came a bit nearer the boy on the step. He brought his lips close to Jinks' ear. "I got a mighty big secret to tell you," he said. "You are the only one of the fellers I'd let into it."

"I say, Toney,—what's it about?" demanded Jinks eagerly. "Does Tommy know, or Bud, or Sis?"

Toney shook his head and glanced about him cautiously. The rear door was closed,—no one was in sight.

"Jake won't be here for a long time," encouraged Jinks. "He's got a lot of orders to fill. I came out early because,—I like it out here." He ended lamely, not caring to say that he had run away from the empty kindling box.

"I declare to gracious, Jinks, if I don't believe I've done caught something from you! Your inside's always a-bothering you, and, cross-my-heart, if there ain't something wrong with mine!" Toney cocked his head on one side as though lis-

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tening for a voice from within to speak. "I'm a-thinking hard of mending my ways." The last words were whispered, and as he uttered them Toney hung his head.

"Get it cleaned out right away, Toney!" nodded Jinks, a bright glow coming into his face, his big eyes shining. He knew all about the remedy he recommended. He had tried it, and though it had caught him by the nape of the neck, as it were, and hauled him up some steep places, it had on the whole worked beautifully. In his interest Jinks got up and placed his hand on Toney's arm. All the unkind treatment he had received a few days before was forgotten in the sudden flood of good fellowship that swept over him.

"My Mr. Flannigan will help you!" he said, and it was a pity Peter could not have heard the little thrill of happy pride in the clear, sweet voice. "He knows just everything in the whole world, Toney, and will fix it all right as soon as ever you tell him."

"I'd like mighty well to tell you all about it, Jinks, but not him," said Toney, rather taken aback at this sudden arrangement for cleaning him up. He had not planned to have Peter take

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a hand at the proposed cleansing. "He don't know nothing about me but the bad, you see, and I'd ruther not come nigh him just yet awhile. After I tell you, why, you can tell him for me. See?" Toney whispered.

Jinks nodded eagerly. "You just hop right slap dab into it and tell me," he said.

Toney hesitated, looking about him fearfully.

"I'm just scared somebody'll hear me," he said. "You know, Jinks, when a feller's been used to swiping things and such, it's a turrible big pull to quit it all to once. And I'm plum feerd the other boys'll laugh and jolly me about it when they find it out. I tell you what! We'll just go a little ways down the Alley here, and talk comfortable. I got a place where I been sleeping lately. I want you to see it anyway. It's mighty cold and bare, but it sure does seem elegant to Tommy Bates and me after we been sleeping on the streets so long. A kind man let us have it for nothing. You ain't grew too proud to go with me, have you?" Toney turned reproachful eyes upon Jinks' face.

"You know I ain't, Toney," he said. "Git along! I'll be plum tickled to go with you. I'd

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better tell Jake, so's he won't wait for me, though."

Toney seized Jinks' sleeve as he turned towards the door. "La, no, there ain't any use in that!" he said hurriedly. "It'll just take a minute and we'll be back long before he comes out. Anyway, it's real close by and we can hear him when he starts putting the things in the wagon."

"All right,—come on, fast's you can!" Jinks hopped out into the Alley on one foot, glancing back over his shoulder at the older boy with the quick, flashing smile that was characteristic of him. Toney turned his head aside to hide the grin that contorted his face.

"All right, Jinks," he said, starting down the Alley. "It's mighty kind of you to come. It's just around this corner here, in Burr Dillard's cellar."

CHAPTER ELEVEN

A week had gone by since the morning Toney Little had invited Jinks to go to his room in Paradise Alley. It was late afternoon, and the setting sun peered into the gloomy, vault-like room in Burr Dillard's cellar, sending a long, slender shaft of gold to lie across the dim, cob-webby ceiling. For a second only each day did the sun's ray gleam upon the dark, damp walls, but as light ever does, it revealed many things during that transitory moment.

The ray of gold was faint and fleeting, but it was strong enough and it stayed long enough to show a child's figure huddled against the wall in the farthest corner of the room. A man sat near on a wooden stool, a long, black whip lying across his knees. The ray of light rested full upon him as it disappeared, traveling from his head to his shoulders. Gloom speedily enveloped him, but the revealing ray had shown clearly the scar on the evil face, the small glittering eyes, the

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sneering mouth, shielded by a thick black moustache.

"I'm getting cussed tired of your stubbornness, youngster!" Dink Todd cracked the whip in the air as he spoke. "I've been working on you constant for a week, and I'll tell you now,—you might as well give in and say you'll do as you are told, for I mean to cut obedience into you with this sooner or later."

Jinks shivered as the whip again hissed through the air with its shrilling song. He shrank farther from the man along the wall, moving slowly and with difficulty, as though his limbs were either cramped or sore. The faint, gray light of the cellar showed that he was in rags,—the rags of his new clothes, which were torn into ribbons. And Jinks was in quite as sad a plight as his garments. A dark bruise discolored one entire cheek and where the shirt had been pulled loose in front, an ugly gash showed on his breast.

"Will you let up in your stubbornness and do as I tell you?" demanded Dink, rising to his feet and placing a heavy hand upon Jinks' shoulder. "Are you ready to give me your promise?"

A long shiver ran through Jinks' battered little

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anatomy. His eyes turned towards the whip in Dink Todd's hand, with an expression of fascinated terror, strange and new in their blue depths. Then slowly his glance met the man's, fair and square. "I ain't a-going to bust open none of Mr. Flannigan's doors for you to get in by! Cross-my-heart I ain't, not if you cuts me into hash every day!" he said defiantly.

A hideous curse rapped into the silence of the cellar. "You little gutter rat! I'll teach you to defy your betters! Take that,—and that,—and that!"

Roused to a brutish fury that increased with each blow he struck, Dink Todd wielded the terrible black whip until too tired to lift it more. Then he threw the half conscious child back against the wall, and dropped down again upon his wooden stool. With his legs crossed, elbow on knee and chin in palm, he sat a moment, staring in silence at the ragged little figure before him.

Jinks was leaning against the wall, his hands pressed hard against the stones on either side of him. They were props, for he had reached the state where outer support was necessary. His will

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could no longer steady his trembling knees, nor strengthen the legs that felt like cotton strings.

“I’ll be darned if you ain’t a game little cuss!” There was a note of very genuine admiration in Dink’s voice. “Honest,—I hate to hurt you.” As he spoke he made the black whip sing through the air.

“You ain’t ever, never teched *me!*” cried Jinks, his voice quivery from exhaustion and pain, but still hauntingly sweet and clear. “You ain’t,—you ain’t,—you CAN’T! It’s jest my skin you’ve hurt, for if you beat and beat for ever and ever and ever, you can’t never get to me!” A queer minor chord of triumph vibrated in the boy’s voice, as he declared his safety. In a strange, sub-conscious way, the gutter child had learned, while in Burr Dillard’s cellar, one of the greatest spiritual truths,—the absolute security from all outward harm of the God-Spark within. Jinks knew,—though as yet in a blind, unreasoning way,—that his inner being lay far beyond the reach of the brutalized creature before him, who could never harm it,—never see it,—never recognize it.

Dink Todd rose to his feet, his face black with

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the baffled, impotent rage of the lower creature, when it realizes its powerlessness to injure the higher. "I'd beat your little carcass into a jelly if I wasn't too tired!" he said, snarling like a wolf. "But you wait, curse you — you wait! For I'll break you yet if I have to kill you!"

Dink strode from the room, locking the door behind him. Jinks stood motionless, leaning against the wall, his small face white and defiant, until the last sound of the retreating footsteps had died in the distance. All his show of bravery disappeared then and he became just a suffering child, alone with his pain. Crumpling up, he slipped down to the stone floor, and lay huddled there, a little, quivering, sobbing heap.

Peter Flannigan had always fit his skin with a smooth and prosperous tightness, but in the weeks that followed Jinks' disappearance it grew too loose for him, and hung about his giant body in queer puffs and folds.

Peter had searched far and wide for the missing boy without any result. No one had seen Jinks after he left the store that early morning to wait on the rear step for Jake. From that moment he



Florence Scovel Shinn

IN THE WEEKS THAT FOLLOWED JINKS' DISAPPEARANCE

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had disappeared as completely and silently as though the earth had opened and swallowed him up.

"He isn't worth looking for, Mr. Flannigan," said one of the clerks to Peter. "He's gone back to his old haunts,—that kind always will, you know. They are bad,—all the way through."

Peter shook his big, shaggy head unbelievably. After that, though, he spoke no more of the boy to those about him. He knew better than they, he thought,—his trust had not been misplaced,—the boy would come back. He had not forgotten the child who came creeping into his room in the gray dawn to sob out a voluntary confession of all the things that he had done. Peter also remembered, with a queer pang, the expression that had been in the clear, blue eyes raised to his from the shielding folds of his own white apron that morning in the rear of the store. Possibly best of all did he remember the overheard night interview with the brown dog in the kindling box,—the determined little figure trudging away next morning bearing its all,—the tragic faced one that came back, empty handed, several hours later.

Peter said nothing of these things to any one.

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He had always been a silent man, living his life alone, expression never having come to him save through his violin. So he jealously gathered up his few little comfort-bits, and, tucking them in a memory corner, looked them over in a companionable sort of way each night as he sat alone in the arm-chair by the big stove,—the so-empty kindling box on the right of him, its gray blankets carefully arranged, that they might be all ready should they be needed unexpectedly.

The days lengthened out into a week, each one dropping into its night with a dragging thump that seemed to Peter Flannigan like the audible clang of a ball and chain.

The only encouragement that had come to Peter during the week drifted his way from a totally unexpected source. He called Sis in a few days after Jinks disappeared, as he saw her wandering disconsolately through the Alley. Sis was lonely, for she missed Jinks, and, as she had turned a disdainful shoulder towards Tommy ever since the day the dog was carried home, she was companionless.

She came over to the store door very willingly in response to Peter's call. There had been a

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truce between them ever since the filling of the little Bannys' paper bags on Christmas day. When she came up to the step Peter asked her views about Jinks with a humble trust in her opinion, that would have seemed queer indeed to any who knew the past relations that had existed between the sturdy storekeeper, and the little vixen of Paradise Alley.

"He ain't run away, Mr. Flannigan," said Sis with a promptness that brought Peter out the door and down on the step. "No, Sir, sure-pop, Jinks ain't run away! He may have went,—or he may have been took, but he never run! Why, Mr. Flannigan, Jinks was that batty about you he just thought you knew everything!"

"But — who took him, Sis,—and, sure now, where could he have gone?" Peter repeated to the child the question that he had asked himself ceaselessly for days until it seemed to him to have positively become a thing with tangible form in the atmosphere about him.

With all his asking Peter had found no answer to his query anywhere. Not so with Sis, who handed him one promptly. "It's his inside,—somehow I know it is," she said without a second's

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hesitation. "I thought that up last night after Mrs. Banny told me he was gone. He ain't run, Mr. Flannigan, I plum know he ain't,—but if he has, just you wait until I catch him!" From Sis's great, gray eyes battle sparks began to fly. "If I don't settle him all right! I'll everlastingly claw his jaw, and pinch his year and chunk him in the stummick's hard's ever I can, Mr. Flannigan, cross-my-heart I will! He ain't run, though."

"But where can he be, Sis?" said Peter, repeating the old question with parrot-like insistence.

"I dunno." Sis shook her fly-away locks. "I dunno yet, but bet your life I'll find him! Cross-my-heart, Mr. Flannigan, if me'n' Tommy don't smell Jinks out if he's anywhere in a mile of Paradise Alley!"

Peter found comfort in Sis's words,—but an even greater mental brace in her head-shake, and in the faith that seemed to radiate from every flying tatter of her ragged skirts as she departed.

The second week after Jinks' disappearance drew heavily to a close, and still no news of the missing boy had reached Peter. The big Irishman had grown pale and haggard under the long

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mental strain, and his temper pepper flew until the nerves of every clerk in the store seemed to water at the eyes and have chronic sneezing fits. The atmosphere was highly charged, and all those who worked for him left him to himself as much as possible, staying out of his way during the day, and hastening off each night at the very earliest possible moment.

Thus it was that Peter stood alone in the grocery department late one afternoon when the rear door opened and Mrs. Banny came flitting in like a string shadow. She had never made her small purchases at Peter's big store, patronizing the small shops that stuck like warts on the various corners of Paradise Alley. Sis had suggested that Mrs. Banny's trade might be of some assistance in brightening the big storekeeper's spirits, so the little caretaker laid a five-cent piece on the counter before Peter, who was leaning back against the shelves, his arms folded across his great breast, his glance fastened unseeingly upon the floor.

"Yes, Sir, it's five cents' worth of coffee, please, Mr. Flannigan," said Mrs. Banny. "It ain't, so to speak, the place it usually takes 'em in, but I'd like the coffee so's I can get her settled and going

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straight before morning, for seeing it's got her in 'em bad, it stands to reason she'd better be looked after."

"Eh?" said Peter, coming out of his abstraction with a jump.

"Yes, Sir," repeated Mrs. Banny, backing her way steadily towards the end of what she had to say. "Yes, Sir — as I said, it don't usually take 'em in the legs, but Granny Tate's worse than common, which it stands to reason she would be, Mr. Flannigan, her being drunk for nearly a month constant."

"I see," nodded Peter. "Sure now, Mistress Banny, but that old woman does lead Sis a terrible life of it."

Mrs. Banny sat down in a weary pile on top of the dill-pickle keg, and wiped her nose on her apron. "It ain't, so to speak, the leading she does, Mr. Flannigan, if she'd leave be the kicking. Five nights Sis have slept on the floor in the passage, and me not knowing a thing about it until to-day, nor Maudine either, which last I'm real grateful for, since she's cross-eyed and sees kinder double, it stands to reason she'd 'a' had more of Sis than she could have took easy."

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"I should rather think so," agreed Peter.

"Yes, Sir, for Sis took once is, so to speak, astonishing,—and what she'd be double it stands to reason ain't anybody able to say." Mrs. Banny wiped her nose again, and then turned her little, crumpled face towards Peter, kindly interest in her faded eyes. "And the boy, now,—have you got any news of him yet, Mr. Flannigan?"

"Not a word, Mistress Banny,—devil a bit of a word!" Much of Peter's inner pain rang in his voice, which was croaky and very unlike his usual hearty boom. "And there do be many, now, who say I'll never hear. It's hard, indeed, Ma'am, after I fed him and sheltered him and cared for him as me own, to have him stay away like this with never a word. I was his friend, and sure 'tis meself that thought he was mine as well." Peter had brooded over his sorrow until it had become hard for him to keep the scales of justice perfectly balanced. He was suffering from a mild attack of self-pity, a queer, miasmatic germ, indeed, to have found entrance in the healthy mentality of Peter Flannigan!

Mrs. Banny did not reply at once, but sat on top of the dill-pickle keg, thoughtfully polishing

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the end of her nose with her apron, her tightly puckered mouth moving steadily in and out as though holding converse with some invisible presence.

"And supposing Jinks ain't your friend no longer, Mr. Flannigan,—supposing he have run away,—" she said at last, her dim eyes meeting Peter's gloomy ones with something in their faded depths that held his glance with a strange insistence. "Supposing he ain't your friend no longer, I say,—ain't you still his, Mr. Flannigan?"

"Ah,—" said Peter, and then paused, patting the tiny pile of coffee on the scales thoughtfully with his big forefinger. "I see, Mistress Banny," he said, a queer light beginning to glow in the deep-set eyes under the shaggy brows. "I see, Ma'am. And 'tis right ye are. It ain't Jinks I'm a-measuring up to. It's me own self and—God A'mighty."

"That's it," said Mrs. Banny, speaking more cheerfully than usual. "As Mr. Banny used to say to me,—'Sally, because Miss Prigger,'—what had the room next to ours,—'splashes her dirty suds under the door between intentional, it ain't

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no sign that you gotter splash yours back at her. It's your own suds you are a-looking out to keep from spattering, Sally,—not hers, and if you, so to speak, do that, it stands to reason you'll get all your puddles mopped up proper and neat, no matter how far Miss Prigger makes hers spread.' ”

Having unwittingly passed the principle of individual responsibility to Peter in its entirety, Mrs. Banny settled herself with a contented sigh upon the pickle keg, glad of the brief rest in the quiet and warmth of the store.

Peter did not reply, but stood with his big hands resting on the counter, looking down thoughtfully at the little pile of unwrapped coffee. He did not see it, though, so deeply was he pondering the fundamental life-truth he had just received in such homely guise. And he accepted it just as it was given to him,—simply, without doubt or question,—because he was unconsciously ready and waiting for it, and it, perforce, had to come.

As he stared blankly at the coffee, Peter Flannigan was suddenly conscious of newly opened eyes far within, whose outlook spread on and on until it was boundless. Then he felt that

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that newly-visioned inside self reached up — up — up — until it touched something vital and laid fast hold upon it with a grasp that Peter intuitively knew was eternal. The outer creature blinked uncertainly as it came in conscious contact for the first time with its God-Spark inside. It gasped a bit at the wrench of that mighty inner lift, and then it took the new gait right gallantly!

Peter reached out for the big scoop in the open bin and, filling it, poured a generous pile of coffee upon the tiny mound that was already on the paper. He had never in all his life given a fraction under weight,—but never before had he ever given a fraction over weight. He did it now slowly and thoughtfully, as though it was something that he liked to do.

And Peter Flannigan's spiritual birth was announced by that extra pile of brown beans far more clearly than it could have been by months of the pyrotechnic cant-rant supposed by the unenlightened to herald such natal hours. With a rare soul-wisdom the big storekeeper had seized upon and instantly carried out the esoteric meaning of the command thrice-given to Peter of old, though he possessed no mental knowledge of it to guide him.

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“Sure now, and ’tis many things that ye be after knowing, Mistress Banny,” said Peter as he wrapped the package of coffee.

Mrs. Banny looked up, a faint smile crossing her dim, little face. “I ain’t a mite of learning, Mr. Flannigan. All I know I just, so to speak, fishes out of life as I go along, same’s I would a dill-pickle out of this barrel, though it stands to reason I wouldn’t, seeing they ain’t mine, being yours.”

Peter scratched his chin thoughtfully. “And, sure now, Mistress Banny, in the final round up ’tis meself that thinks the only things that’ll count much will be what we’ve fished out of life.”

“I’m fearing constant it’ll be a mighty mixer then, Mr. Flannigan, earth’s last cleaning up day, so to speak. And what me’n’ Mr. Banny’ll do I can’t see real clear, with the billy goats and the sheep and the dill-pickles since we’ve suffered an infliction of thirteen, with the sets, and the four we laid away being riz, as it stands to reason they will.—” Mrs. Banny had gotten up to go, but she sat down suddenly, too tightly wound in her own words to move, either mentally or physically.

“Whist, now!” said Peter, leaning across the

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counter to bestow a very kind smile upon the little figure shaking its head dazedly on the pickle keg. "Just ye be after giving the coffee to the old lady extry strong now,—for there's plenty more where this came from, and as near boiling hot as she can be made to take it down. And if she's bad in the legs again, or in the tongue either, ye can have Sis hike for yon kindling box. Sure, now, and 'tis kept all ready for the boy when he comes back to it, but until he do, Mistress Banny, ma'am, it does be after seeming the emptiest place ever I have seen in me born life, at all, at all!"

Nearly three weeks had passed since the morning Jinks had sat upon the rear step, waiting to start off with Jake in the big delivery wagon.

It was night, and again the man with the scar and the child faced each other in Burr Dillard's cellar. At least it was a man,—the wild-eyed, white-faced, shivering creature that the flickering candle light fell upon bore little resemblance to a child.

"We are not going to bother with you no longer," snarled Dink Todd.

Jinks' blue eyes brightened. He looked up

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hopefully, from where he stood leaning against the damp wall, a faint tinge of pink creeping into his wan cheeks. "You are going to let me go back to him,—to Mr. Flannigan?" he cried eagerly, the hope within lending strength to his wavering voice.

The light in the blue eyes and the hope in the small heart both died quickly, drenched beneath the sting of Dink Todd's laughter.

"Let you go back?" he scoffed. "Why, sonny, just you listen to this. We are going to take you back! We are going to tie a rope around you good and tight this very night, and drop you over the door into old Flannigan's store. And you are to unfasten the chain and turn the key in the lock so's we can join you. We like you too well to let you stay away from us long. And as you won't promise to go along peaceably, and do as you've been told to do,—why, we'll just keep a gun p'inted your way and see if that can't help you to obey when you get your orders good and clear. Just you let out a sound, or just you fail to undo that door fast and easy, and I'll pull you straight back up to that transom and plug daylight through you in forty places, if I have to swing for it!

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You know too much, anyway, and when a boy gets in my way I'll shoot him down as quick as I would a dog."

Jinks' small figure seemed trying to shrink into the wall against which he crouched, as he stared at the man before him, a great horror on his worn, childish face.

"Do you understand?" roared Dink Todd, with a bitter curse.

Jinks nodded, his lips refusing to form any answer.

"Well, just keep it hard and tight in your caroty cocoanut that I mean what I say, and that what I promise you I'll do, as sure as I'm a living sinner!" There was that in Dink's face and voice that attested to the absolute sincerity of his words. "We'll be along for you in about an hour," he added, turning away.

As Dink Todd slammed and locked the cellar door, a ragged figure arose from the ground beside the window in the alley, and scuttled away in the darkness.

It was Tommy Bates!

Sis had interviewed Tommy immediately after leaving Peter Flannigan the day he had sought her

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aid in finding Jinks. In a few concise sentences she put Tommy in possession of all the facts. "And now you gotter find him," she said, fastening an accusing eye upon Tommy, "'cause you done it."

"I didn't!" he retorted, consternation on his snub-nosed face as he wriggled beneath her impaling glance. "And I just double-dare you to say I did!"

"You done it," repeated Sis, finality in her voice. "You punched that dog right smack out of his inside, and that started him to going. I know Jinks, and when once he gets started good, ain't nothing nor yet nobody a-going to head him off. That's one how come I know he's hitched somewhere hard and tight by his inside. And you done it first, so now you gotter find him."

Tommy grew visibly depressed. His own vivid recollection of the interview with Jinks regarding the dog arose in his memory, adding to a sudden sense of guilt that he found unpleasantly heavy. "I say,—ain't you going to help?" he demanded.

Sis nodded her fly-away locks. "Sure pop! Ain't I done already helped a lot?" she asked. "Ain't I started you, and ain't I everlastingly

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going to stick to you to see that you keep going, and chunk you in the stummick whenever you try to stop? I'll hunt, too, but I'm going to see good and plenty that you don't get a mite of rest night or day, Tommy Bates, until we find Jinks, 'cause you done it. You gotter stick to Toney."

Tommy's mouth opened. "What I gotter stick to Toney for?" he snorted. "I'll be darned if I do! That Toney Little he's got so puffed-uppety lately he needs to be smacked bald headed, that's what he needs. And I gotter good mind to do it, too!" Some of Tommy's resentment towards Sis, that he dared not utter, found vent in this Toney pop-out.

"Don't you do nothing to Toney to make him mad at you!" Sis came close to Tommy, mysterious warning in her big, gray eyes. "Cross-my-heart, Tommy, if I don't believe he knows where Jinks is at!"

Tommy's black eyes bulged. "What makes you think so?" he demanded, eager curiosity in his face. Toney had lately hinted that he knew many things of import too vast to be intrusted to Tommy. And as Tommy's curiosity mounted, his bitter resentment increased in proportion.

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"I just know he does," said Sis, her eyes suddenly taking on a queer, unseeing expression, as though they were gazing upon some vision lying deep within.

Tommy shook her, though gently. It was not always safe to land Sis too suddenly from one of her aërial flights. "You stop that moon-eyeing!" he ordered. "You stay right here where we are at, and tell me how come you know Toney's up to devilment?"

For a wonder Sis did not resent her abrupt tumble back to Paradise Alley. She looked at Tommy with big, contemplative eyes. "I—I don't know how I know, Tommy, but I *know* I do! I know it,—no, I don't, I *see* it, right in here where all the things I know are, that are the fortrue ones." Sis laid a small, dirty hand over her solar-plexus.

Tommy hunched up his shoulders disgustedly. "Gee! Now here you go to sprouting you one! As if Jinks with a inside wasn't bad enough, you had to go catch you one too!"

"I ain't caught one,—I've had one all the time, and I just double-dare you to say I ain't, Tommy Bates!" said Sis tartly. "And I know

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with my inside knower that Toney's up to something! You gotter find it out!"

"You do it, Sis. Toney turns plum green whenever you start at him. You'd scare it out of him the very first flop you made!"

"I get sick when I start at him," said Sis. "And I have to wash my hands whenever I've fought Toney. No, Sir, you gotter stick to him and then set on him. I ain't going to set on no such squirmy something as Toney Little is,—he's real crawly. I know he got hatched a snake and then grewed into a boy. So, now you gotter stick to him and when you catch up with him, you gotter set right slap-bang on him! If you don't I'll jump on you and claw your jaw and pinch your year! See?"

"I see," said Tommy gloomily, accepting the less of the two evils thrust upon him. "I see, Sis, and I'll stick and I'll set."

Obeying Sis's orders literally, Tommy had scoured Paradise Alley both by day and by night in his search for Jinks. Not a single thing had he been able to discover definitely, though, until the day preceding Dink Todd's night interview with his captive in Burr Dillard's cellar.

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His zeal constantly re-fired by Sis's insistent orders, Tommy had clung to Toney with a tenacity of purpose and a constancy of endeavor that at last got on the older boy's nerves, causing him to stay closely around Burr Dillard's quarters, in an effort to shake loose the small and ragged Fate dogging his footsteps.

And by dodging voluntarily,—as the guilty usually do,—Toney Little made a grave mistake. For as he could no longer stalk his prey visibly, Tommy at once proceeded to do so invisibly, by clinging like a two-legged cockle-burr to the house that he had discovered sheltered Toney.

He had hung about the dingy tenement the better part of every day for a week, until at last he became convinced that some one or something of vast importance was concealed in the cellar. His prize once in a measure located, the rest was easy to Tommy Bates, depending only upon time and opportunity.

Daily Tommy flattened himself out under the tiny cellar window that opened into the alley, and each night he took up the same position, lying there for hours with the patience of a Pillar Saint, totally unmindful of the bitter cold. The hunt-

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ing instinct, that necessity develops early in those dependent upon their wits for subsistence, was rapidly maturing in Tommy Bates.

He kept up his daily and nightly watch for almost a week, but without hearing or seeing anything. At last, though, his psychological moment arrived. Just as he stretched himself out one night he saw a faint flicker of light on the cellar ceiling. Tommy at once glued a keen, black eye to the tiny window, removing it with a gasp to apply an ear. And all through Dink Todd's interview with Jinks he sat crouched by the little opening, applying to the broken glass first one and then the other of the two mediums through which the mind secures information of material things. Tommy's own keen wits easily supplied all the missing links in the chain, whose end he held, and when he at last went plunging through the darkness, he was in full possession of the plans for that night.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Peter Flannigan sat alone in his room the same night that Tommy Bates crouched beside the window of Burr Dillard's cellar. The big store-keeper had gone up to bed; but, instead of undressing, he had dropped heavily down into a large chair, and with his head resting on the back, sat thinking,—listening,—wondering,—hoping, as he did every night now. Surely the boy he had trusted had not deceived him! But where had he gone so suddenly,—so mysteriously,—so silently,—leaving not the slightest trace behind?

Peter moved restlessly, and as he did so he turned his head, and the light beside him on the table, falling full upon his face, showed that the past weeks had plowed their record deep on the rugged countenance, for there were new lines on the brow,—new hollows in the cheeks,—new wrinkles about the keen, gray eyes.

Peter sighed as he moved, the short, impatient breath that tells its own tale of ceaseless inner

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pain. He had not believed it possible for the loss of anything to make him feel so desolate,—so lonely; that he could miss any one so keenly. He sighed again heavily and wearily as he realized with a terrible, gnawing inside ache that he had not merely felt an interest in the gutter boy who had come so suddenly into his life,—he had not just shared with him what he had, but what he was as well. He had given to Jinks all the pent-up love of a life that had been bitterly hard and terribly alone, more alone possibly in that it had seemingly been lived in close and constant contact with his kind. Peter knew, though, that none of his inner self had ever gone out to any one; it had remained sealed deep within,—intact,—until the past two months.

A sudden shower of pebbles against the window brought Peter out of his musings with a nervous start. He went quickly across the room, his heart pounding heavily, as it always did of late at the slightest unusual sound.

“Who’s there?” he demanded, opening the window wide and thrusting his head out.

“It’s me,—Tommy!” came in a piercing hiss through the gloom. “I done found Jinks, Mr.

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Flannigan! I ain't got no time to tell it all to you now, but they are going to rob your store to-night! They are going to drop Jinks through the opening over the top of the back door, and he's to let 'em in! I dunno how many. I'd have been here sooner only I butted ker-slap inter Toney, and I just got loose."

"I'll be right down and let you in, Tommy!" cried Peter.

But Tommy was already scurrying away in the blackness of the night.

"No, you don't! I ain't got no time!" he hissed back shrilly. "They are right behind me! I'm going for Sis,—and the perlice!" Then the gloom of the Alley swallowed him up.

Peter Flannigan remained motionless beside the window until the sound of Tommy's retreating footsteps had died away in the distance. In the man's mind the startling news just imparted to him, that he was about to be robbed, had found no lodgment, though he had not been to the bank for weeks and there were many thousands of dollars in the cash box under the bed.

But one thing stood out clearly in Peter's consciousness. Jinks was coming,—the boy he had

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trusted was going to throw wide the doors of the home that had sheltered him to admit those who wanted to rob the man who loved him! That thought alone faced the big storekeeper, gripping his heart with a pain so keen it seemed as if it was being wrung physically between two merciless, iron hands.

"Somebody,—something,—must stop the boy!" Peter muttered dully to himself as he moved heavily over to the table in the center of the room. He walked like one suddenly grown old and feeble, and stood with his shaggy head fallen forward, his mighty shoulders sunken, his whole giant frame relaxed.

As the full horror of the thing coming upon him bit its way into his inner consciousness like some corroding acid, he suddenly threw his head back and flung wide his great arms, his big hands clinched. And it was no prayer that tore its way across Peter Flannigan's lips, but a soul-call hurled upward towards The Infinite with all the dynamic force of a spirit on fire with the desire to save another from even the appearance of sin. "God!" he cried, his deep voice jolting as though dragged over cobble

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stones. "Almighty,— whoever Ye are,— wherever Ye be,— stop him! Head the boy! Well do Ye be after knowing that never a bit do I care for the paltry cash,— them that is with him can have it all and welcome. But don't let 'em damn the boy! Stop the child I have loved and trusted as me own! Kill him, strike him down dead if Ye need to, but stop him! If Ye can't see your way clear to tripping him up neat,— clamp down on him inside somewhere and make him yell,— make him yell like seven devils had him, to let me know he's coming! Anything, anyhow — I ain't particular about what 'tis Ye do,— only head him so's he'll not go through life bearing the foul blot stamped in him that he came sneaking like a thief in the night against the man who was his friend! Keep that dirt out of him!"

Peter moved over to his big chair and dropped heavily into it. He had no thought of his own personal danger and possible loss,— no faintest idea of calling for police protection. When a soul is on fire to save another, it scales heights and sounds depths impossible until self is left behind. So it was that with no thought in his mind save Jinks, Peter Flannigan sat motionless in his room,

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waiting, unarmed and alone, for what was coming upon him.

It was but a few moments before his keen ears caught the shuffle of stealthy footsteps in the Alley below. No other sound broke upon the stillness for a little while. Then Peter could detect a light scratching, so low that it might have been made by a busy mouse. They were removing the glass from the transom over the door.

And Jinks was there, though he made no sound! With a groan Peter dropped his face in his hands. "If he would but say just the one word!" he muttered.

But no such word came.

Another silence fell. Then there was a faint noise below. Peter did not lift his face from his hands. He felt rather than knew, that Jinks was being hoisted through the narrow opening over the door.

It seemed to Peter then that all his being was centered in his ears,—that his sense of hearing was projected far from him,—reaching out, as it were, demanding the call that did not come. There was a dull thud below stairs, as of a body striking the floor. And then —

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“Oh, Mr. Flannigan! Mr. Flannigan! It's me! I've come home, Mr. Flannigan! It's Jinks!” rang through every corner of the store, in the voice that fright and pain had had no power to rob of its heart-searching music. “Git up, Mr. Flannigan! They've come to rob you! Git up,—git up quick!”

Loud and clear came the child's voice the second time. At the same moment there was the jar of a heavy body scrambling against the door. Then there were three shots in quick succession, so loud that they were evidently fired over the door into the store below. At the third, a sharp cry of agony went up.

It was Jinks' voice.

“Thank God!” burst from Peter Flannigan's lips in a mingled shout of joy and groan of despair. He literally rolled down the stairs. With trembling hands he switched on the lights, and on the floor, his feet tied, a rope about his waist, lay Jinks in a huddled heap. He lay as the dead lie, a slowly widening pool of blood creeping out from under his right side.

“Jinks, me boy!” No one would have recognized Peter Flannigan's voice as he knelt by the

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ragged pile on the floor. No one would have believed his great hands could be so tender as he lifted the slight figure in his arms.

"Sure, child, ye be back at home once more! Don't ye be after knowing that now?" Utterly regardless of the deafening noise in the Alley, Peter carried his unconscious burden to the kindling box, and, placing it gently down on the gray blanket, tried as best he could to stanch the blood flowing from the right shoulder.

A heavy hand beating on the door aroused him. "Open, in the name of the law!" roared a loud voice.

Peter at once threw wide the door, and several blue-coated officers came crowding into the store, a few ragged citizens of Paradise Alley peering curiously in from the darkness without.

"We caught three of 'em, Sir," said the tallest policeman. "And I'm pretty sure that chap with the scar on his face is an old prison bird we've been looking for for a long time. A fellow out there in the Alley said that one had been shot in here. We've come for him."

"Sure and one has been shot in here," said Peter, his deep voice full of queer croaks and

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creaks. There he lies," pointing to the small huddled figure lying in the kindling box.

"Why — that's just a child!" gasped the big policeman.

"Sure! That's the sort of creature we call a child in this city! Right out here in Paradise Alley ye'll find a plentiful crop of 'em being raised for the devil's own reaping." As he ceased speaking, Peter knelt again beside Jinks.

"I guess we'd better take him with us if he's still alive," said the officer. "He was mixed up in this fracas, and he'll get along just as well at the jail as he will here."

Peter Flannigan leaped to his feet at one bound, and turned around with a roar such as might have come from some maddened animal.

"Take this boy to jail, is it?" he bellowed, his big face purple, his eyes blazing. "Indeed, now, me foine fellow, and I'd just loike to see ye have a bit of a try at that! Sure and I would!"

"I represent the Law," said the officer warningly.

"And devil a bit do I care what ye represent or who!" exploded Peter. "Sure, and 'tis meself that represents yon injured boy, and me very own

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self that same being a man that'll die right in his own tracks to protect his own child under his own roof!" He flourished his white apron in one hand as he spoke, like a battle flag, and doubled the other up into a fist the size of a half-grown cabbage.

"Oh, but don't I just ever-lastingly double-dare you to tech Jinks!" a high voice suddenly shrilled from out the gloom in the Alley. The startled crowd parted to right and left and a tattered little figure whirled into the center of the room, looking as she paused before the policeman like an animated buzz-saw in petticoats. Sis's sleeves were pushed up to her shoulders, leaving her thin, brown arms bare; her hands were doubled up into two tight little fists that waved fearlessly and threateningly right under the astonished officer's big nose.

"I dare you to tech him!" she cried, her great eyes flashing gray lightning, and her black elf-locks seeming to literally stand out from her small, pale face. "You dassent do nothing to Jinks — you just dassent put your finger on him! If you do, cross-my-heart, if I don't claw your jaw and pinch your year and chunk you in the stummick!

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And if that ain't enough to settle you good and plenty, I'll take to fists or rocks, you to have first choice and first go!"

"I say—" gasped the astonished officer, backing away from the small fury who followed him up closely as he retreated. "What's the matter with you, anyway?"

"Jinks never done nothing!" a second shrill voice piped, and Tommy Bates bobbed into view from just without the open door. He had given the alarm to the first officer he met that night, and had then promptly taken to his heels, for Tommy objected seriously to policemen,—and with good reason. To-night, though, something got wrong with his little inside every time he glanced towards the kindling box, and he felt that the only way to dislodge that queer, uneasy sensation was to speak out, though his knees quaked beneath him, and he felt all gone in his middle every time one of the officers looked in his direction.

"Well, what is it?" demanded the policeman shortly. "Tell us what you know about this affair."

"I know all about it," said Tommy with a jaunty chin tilt, and at least a two-inch increase

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in stature, as he noted the general interest that his remark aroused.

"Go ahead then and tell it," said the officer sternly. "We have already wasted too much time here!" He frowned darkly at Sis as he spoke.

She at once responded with a defiant shake of her head, and, backing across the room, sat down on the edge of the kindling box, one hand resting protectingly on Jinks, her eyes fastened unwinkingly upon the policeman.

"Why, I heard 'em a-fixing it all up to-night in Burr Dillard's cellar," said Tommy, sidling around towards Peter, and at the same time keeping one eye on the door. "And that chap with the busted eye, he told Jinks he'd kill him as sure as sure if he so much as let out a squeak to warn old — I mean MR. Flannigan. And Jinks he wouldn't promise nothing, and just yelled like a house afire as soon as they dropped him over to let Mr. Flannigan know all about it. And so they blowed a hole right straight through him! Gee, but he's got sand all right, Jinks has, if he is little!"

"Ah," said the officer, nodding his head, "I see."

"A-h-h," breathed Peter Flannigan in a queer,

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smothered choke. "And sure, I see too!" There was such a mist in Peter's keen eyes that he did not know he was trying to find a name in the telephone directory with the book upside down. "'Tis a doctor I'm wanting," he said, looking around him helplessly, and speaking more to himself than to any one else, as his trembling hands fumbled with the leaves. "And I want the best that's to be had, too, for though the boy's breathing and his heart's beating, he needs attention and he needs it bad."

Tommy had backed hastily out of the door as soon as he finished his speech, and the darkness had swallowed him up. Now he pulled himself inside the store again.

"Out on the Bullyvard, Mr. Flannigan!" he cried excitedly. "The dog man's a doctor. Dr. Jasper Brereton, that's what his name is, and he'll come a-hiking. I know for he skeets about in a ottermobeel. I saw him to-day and he sure was moving some! Oh, my!"

"I'll be going on now, Sir," said the big officer in a low tone to Peter. "We've three of them out yonder in the wagon. There was another but he got away. A young chap he was, and he sure

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did run like a deer. How about this one?" He pointed to Tommy Bates as he spoke.

Peter turned around from the telephone where he had just called Dr. Brereton. "That one? Oh, he's all right! He's a friend of mine," said the big storekeeper. "Sure now, and I'll look out for him!"

The officers went their way, and the crowd outside gradually melted into the black gloom of the Alley.

As the wagon rattled off with its load, Tommy stood an instant on the doorstep batting his eyes, a dazed expression on his dark, impudent face. "Mr. Flannigan's FRIEND!" he muttered to himself. He shook his head, then stuck a jaunty thumb in each armhole of his ragged jacket and stepped down into the Alley. "Mr. Flannigan's FRIEND!" he repeated, cocking his cap at a rakish angle over one ear. "Ah, Tommy Bates, ain't you coming up in the world, though! MR. FLANNIGAN'S FRIEND!" And, inflating his meager chest in a miniature imitation of Peter's expansive front, Tommy strutted off alone into the darkness.

After closing the rear door, Peter Flannigan

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knelt down by the side of the kindling box and bent anxiously over the small, limp figure lying on the gray blankets. His big hands were fumbling helplessly with the blood-soaked shirt, when a dirty little paw was laid on his shoulder.

Peter turned with a start, and his keen eyes looked straight into Sis's big gray ones. All their battle light was gone now, and, as they rested on Jinks' white face, they were wonderfully soft, with a strange haunting motherliness in their depths.

"You let me," Sis said to Peter, her voice low and croony as she slipped down on her knees at his side. "You just let me! I'll fix him real easy so's he can't die until the dog man comes. You don't know how to tie 'em up, but I do, you see, for I have to mend all the little Bannys, and they get theirselves broke most every day!"

Peter Flannigan and Jasper Brereton stood in the rear door of the store next morning just as the soft, rosy light of early dawn came slipping through Paradise Alley, driving away its lurking shadows. A moment before they had left Jinks upstairs in Peter's own big bed. The boy was bandaged like a little mummy, but wide awake, and holding a silky brown dog close clasped within

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the shelter of his uninjured arm. Sis was on guard close beside him, sitting bolt upright in Peter's own chair, as silent as a statue, her big uncanny eyes as watchful as those of a young lynx.

"The child will pull through, Mr. Flannigan, but it will take a long time and much care. The very best of care indeed, for he is a badly battered up little object. The boy has been roughly — brutally handled," said Dr. Brereton.

Peter's giant form shivered and his red face grew white at the other's words. "Sure now, Sir, and 'tis meself that saw 'em all,— the cuts and the bruises,— far plainer than ever ye did, I'll warrant! He fought hard,— the blamed little cuss!" The last words were spoken so low that Dr. Brereton did not catch them, though his keen glance noted the glow they sent into the big store-keeper's deep-set eyes. "He shall have the care, Sir, be ye very sure of that; the very best that's to be had in the city," Peter added.

The tall, dark-faced surgeon hesitated on the back doorstep. He was deeply interested, but did not like to ask too many questions. It was a strange case he thought, the very strangest he had ever encountered. He had recognized Jinks the

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moment the child's unconscious face had been turned to the light that morning, but what could have wrought such havoc? What had changed the boy in one short month from the well clad little chap he had been when he carried the dog home, into the battered, torn and ragged creature he was at present? And what queer freak of Fate had brought together the two dingy bits of human driftwood upstairs and the tall prosperous man standing before him, his great hands thrust through the belt of his white apron, his face outshining the sun that was beginning to tinge the housetops with gold? And how did it happen that a man who looked like a butcher possessed a room handsomely, even artistically, furnished, and with an atmosphere about it that the cultured, refined man of the world had felt and responded to the very instant he had entered it?

Jasper Brereton was frankly puzzled. He was also deeply interested. "The little chap,— does he belong to you, Mr. Flannigan?" he asked, led on to voice the question by something in the big Irishman's clear eyes.

"Not me son, Sir," said Peter simply, the old hearty boom back in his deep voice, his broad

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face all crinkly and quivery with smiles whose joy-light seemed to illumine the entire rear of the store.

"Ye see he's just me child, Sir, hitched to me by an inside clinch that's as far beyond any outside tie of flesh and blood as what ye know is beyond what ye think. He's mine, Jinks is, that's all, and sure 'tis meself that's his. We was each other's Christmas prisints."

"Ah," said Dr. Brereton as he slowly drew on his gloves. "The little fellow interested me greatly the other day when he came out to my home with the dog."

Peter Flannigan's broad bulk shook. He closed one gray eye in a ponderous wink, and bestowed upon Dr. Brereton a confidential and beaming grin. "And whist now, Doctor! But wasn't it the wonderful thing that ye should have fetched the dog along with ye? Sure, and the little scamp hadn't forgot either the boy or the nest in the kindling box, at all, at all! Do ye mind how straight he made for 'em both?"

A smile crossed Jasper Brereton's face as he recalled the half-delirious capers the little brown dog had so recently cut in the rear of the store.

"Bat insisted on coming with me this morning,—

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he and I were reading in the library when your call came. He likes to ride in the auto, though I seldom take him, for he has a sad habit of going off on private expeditions of his own. He was on one of these business trips when your boy found him. I'm glad he came this time though, even if he has deserted me. He refused to move when I started just now." The surgeon hesitated before he added, "And the little chap's name, Mr. Flannigan? May I ask that?"

"Never a bit of a name has he got,—or ever has had, Sir, that I know of. He just grew in the mud of Paradise Alley," said Peter. "But as soon as the day gets here and settles itself down a bit, sure and I'm going to a lawyer's and give him me own as tight as it can be given, so's we two will never get lost from each other again, at all, at all!"

"Don't you think you are taking a very great risk, Mr. Flannigan, to adopt a waif like that? Both your name and your standing might suffer." Jasper Brereton ceased abruptly, silenced by the expression in the keen gray eyes that measured him from crown to heel in one swift, comprehensive glance.

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“Faith now, Sir, and ’tis easy shook a man’s standing must be if a deed of mercy’s going to dislodge him from his perch, and ’tis meself that thinks he’d better come on down, quiet and easy like, before ’tis discovered what a slippery foothold he’s got!” said Peter — “And as for me name,—sure, and ’tis a poor name indade, and one made of moth-eaten material, that’s been shrunk in the wash so bad it ain’t worth a froze potato, if it can’t stretch enough to give shelter to a child whose only sin, as I see it, lies in just possessing the life that another’s deed of evil thrust upon him, before he got here to be even asked how he liked the dose measured out for him! Joseph’s name covered One and Its Mother nigh two thousand years ago, and I take it he’s stood out pretty strong and stiddy ever since as a MAN, though it may be now, in your world, ye’d not just be after calling him a gentleman. As for me, Sir, sure ’tis proud and happy I am this day to feel that God A’mighty has sized up Peter Flannigan’s name and found that it’s big enough and clean enough and broad enough for Him to risk placing one of His little ones beneath it for safe keeping!”

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Peter's eyes had lost their keenness. They were wide and bright and filled with a light that for a passing second revealed clearly the big, self-free soul glowing within.

"But, think of what such a child might inherit, Mr. Flannigan," said Jasper Brereton.

"Devil a bit will I!" boomed Peter's hearty voice. "Sure now, Sir, and 'tis of the things we don't inherit that I always hitch me thinking strings to. Bedad, and I'll travel at no kin-hobbled gait through life, limping because me great-grandfather happened to have a bunion as big as a walnut on his foot! Each soul walks its beat on its own ten toes, and if there's a limp anywhere around it's the living's, not the dead's."

"And you don't believe in blood, then?" demanded Dr. Brereton, clinging with the blind devotion of an antique collector to the fossilized notion of heredity.

"Sure and I do, Sir," retorted the big store-keeper. "And rich and red and plenty of it,—in its place. But do ye know, it strikes me that God A'mighty has been a stirring up soul crusts long enough to be a master hand at the job by now, and that we can risk Him to put in the right

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ingredients. So buttermilk or blueing, or even Paradise Alley mud as a mixer, just as happens to tickle His fancy, say I."

"You are a good man, Mr. Flannigan." As Jasper Brereton uttered the trite platitude he looked at the big figure standing in the open doorway as though it was some clumsy earth bug he could not quite classify.

In the neatly embroidered social eyelet where most of his life was spent, men of the grocery man's size did not exist. Perchance they could not grow there, for when souls rise beyond the self-gauge they at once demand room in which to expand, and if they do not find it, they make it. And when they do this last many small useless things break with a resounding crash that causes dire consternation in the contracted confines of social eyelets. Frequently the pretty pattern is quite marred and to the spiritually hide-bound that spells Tragedy indeed.

Peter's face crinkled up into a beamy grin. He laughed like a jolly bass fiddle. "Sure now, Sir, no man is 'good,' because he happens to chin God A'mighty's pole of Right when 'tis held out before him, plain and clear. Straight up and over with

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no ducking or side stepping, is the way the order comes, and if so be he busts a few stitches as he goes so much the better for him, for sure he'll get his self-love tucks ripped out all the faster then. 'Tis such tricks as pole chinning that turns professing into practise, that last being prime for giving a body firm foothold when he does the final high jump that takes him from this world into the next. He sheds his name, Sir, and his standing as he goes across, along with all the rest of his gentlemanly fluff, and 'lights ker-slap-bang, right before God A'mighty, **JUST WHAT HE IS**, as naked as a picked jay bird with even its pin feathers singed! "

"Maybe so," said Jasper Brereton thoughtfully, his dark, somber eyes glancing up and down the long, narrow tunnel of Paradise Alley, which showed in all its hideousness by the revealing light of the early dawn. He shivered slightly as he looked. "Your theories fly pretty high, Mr. Flannigan, too high for me."

Peter chuckled genially. "Maybe so, Sir, maybe so," he said. "But 'tis pleased I am they fly up instead of a-squatting down. I've noticed that theories, oftener than ye'd believe now,

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hatches into acts unexpected like. And 'tis from seeing some of the queer broods let loose on the world that I try to be a bit careful of the idea eggs my mind sets on."

Dr. Brereton smiled and shrugged his well-clad shoulders. "Well, I think Paradise Alley is a big enough fact to bring us back to earth again. It's a cancerous spot in our city, and it's hard to believe that anything worth while could grow in such a place. It seems that even a little child from its gutters would have become befouled past the cleansing."

Peter Flannigan turned a strange, thoughtful look upon the handsome, distinguished man standing on the step. He seemed to be searching deep inside for the words his lips would utter. "Sure now and I don't know about that, Sir," he said slowly at last. "Faith and 'tis meself that's beginning to think that many a foul and dark appearing thing is laid at our feet, dropped down, careless like, that we may pick it up and bear it to the light of day. When we do that, Sir, mayhap we'll find that 'twas but a bit of God Himself that hadn't bloomed out yet because it was meant for us to be after having the chance to plant it,—

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as ye might say,—water it a bit, and place it where the Sun could shine upon it and cause it to grow,—for the one that tended it,—and for the One that made it.”

As the mounting Sun flung its rays high above the housetops, its light fell warmly upon Peter Flannigan's giant form where it stood on one end of the back doorstep. Across the other end, where Jasper Brereton was standing, the tall tenement over the way cast a deep shadow, cold and bleak. He remained motionless a moment in the gloom after Peter ceased speaking, and then drawn irresistibly by the inner radiance all aglow on the face of the big man in the Sun, he came from out the shade and paused close to Peter — in the light.

For a fleeting second the light in Peter Flannigan's broad countenance was reflected in the self-sick, world-weary face of the man by the chuckling auto. He glanced towards the window of the upper room with a brief nod and smile flash. “I think you have found your ‘Bit,’ Mr. Flannigan,” he said, extending his hand in farewell as he spoke.

Both Peter's big hands closed in a crushing pressure upon the slender fingers in his grasp. “Faith now and 'tis meself that knows I have,

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Sir," he said simply. " And bedad it's because I did not turn me back upon it when it was given to me, but took it close in me arms, mud and all, real grateful like, as a sacred gift-charge from the One that made it."



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